

The background of the book cover is a solid black rectangle. Overlaid on this are several concentric circles in a light gray color. The circles are centered and their radii increase from the center outwards, creating a ripple effect. The text is centered within this design.

BOOK OF STUFF I

SCOTT DOUGLAS JACOBSEN

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Here, I present some of the latter: The Beam Magazine, College Rentals, Check Your Head, Lifespan Cognition Lab, Westside Seniors Hub, Learning Analytics Research Group, Lost in Samsara, Center for Inquiry Canada, iData Research Inc, PardesSeleh.Com, Lift Cannabis News, Karmik, Islamic Supreme Council of Canada, AUSU Executive Blog, Develop Africa, and Atheist Alliance of America.

Scott

The Beam Magazine

Women's empowerment in the sustainability industry

March 9, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Solar Sister eradicates energy poverty by empowering women with economic opportunity.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: The empowerment of women is a global goal enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDGs #5 (gender equality) and #10 (reduced inequalities). One major area requiring immediate implementation of long-term solutions is renewable technologies for sustainable development. Women are making strides in the renewable and sustainable technology sectors, as well as in the sectors of business, entrepreneurship and innovation, working to develop solutions to the one of the biggest crises facing the global population: climate change. *The Beam* asked two women leaders in the renewable and sustainable technology sectors about bringing women into the male-dominated sustainability industry and the industry's relationship with women's empowerment.

What is the most effective means of involving women in sustainability and renewable energies?

Antonella Battaglini: I actually think that we need women to move into other areas beyond sustainability and renewable energies and bring their expertise and perspectives into the highly male dominated energy sector. Sustainability, despite major progresses, still remains a minor factor in industry development and strategies.

Only a few companies are making sustainability a fundamental pillar of their short- and long-term strategies and operation. So what is the most effective means to increase the number of women in the energy sector in relevant and leading positions? I do not believe that a quota can do the job although it may help to change mentality over time. I think we need to train women to be active and strong board members, and to increase their resilience in tough environments which are often contradictory with women's family lives.

Barbara Buchner: *It is positive that the issue of gender equality is now being taken seriously by many international organizations that are focusing on sustainable development and improving access to clean energy. The Paris Agreement explicitly recognized that action to address climate change should respect, promote and consider gender equality, which is a positive step forward. Similarly, mainstreaming gender equality into climate action is now a top priority for many bilateral and multilateral aid organizations, including the World Bank.*

This high-level, political focus is of course welcome and to be encouraged. The challenge now is to ensure these goals and objectives filter down to action on the ground, and that gender impacts are considered and addressed in a meaningful way (rather than just a 'tick box' exercise). Training will be key—as this calls for a new model of development. Similarly, it will be vital to involve women and women's organizations in stakeholder groups and consultations, and on steering committees of projects, so that they can bring their strong local knowledge to bear and to ensure the potential impacts on women are acknowledged and addressed.

Jacobsen: What is the relationship to women's advocacy, empowerment, and rights to sustainability and renewable energies?

Antonella Battaglini: Women may have a reconciling role in society and the energy sector: they have been deprived of power over centuries and have developed interests that stretch more into the future. For example, they feel the urge to protect the environment for the well being of their kids in the future. While society is changing fast, a lot of times women still don't acknowledge or use the power they actually have due to societal taboos and religious constraints. Sustainability is where they have found a space to grow without threatening the male dominated status quo. For a revolution, it will take much longer, I am afraid.

Barbara Buchner: *Energy access and energy poverty affects both men and women in developing countries but the impacts for women are often more severe. Women are often responsible for many household activities including cooking and household and community energy provision.*

Without access to modern energy services, women and children can spend most of their day collecting fuel, preventing them from pursuing employment, education, and other opportunities to improve their livelihoods. At the same time, indoor air pollution from cooking from coal, wood, charcoal or dung affects the health of women and children in particular. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that women and children make up the majority of the estimated four million annual deaths caused by indoor air pollution.

Therefore, improving access to clean energy can have a dramatic impact on women's' health, empowerment and ability to take up economic opportunities. Furthermore, efforts to improve access to clean energy can benefit hugely from the involvement of women. Women often have strong local knowledge and know-how about sustainable resource management in the local community and their immediate households. Conversely, failure to involve women can lead to increasing inequality and implementation of less effective projects and initiatives.

College Rentals

Tips to keep your apartment smelling fresh

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

You wake up. You're tired. You rush to make coffee, run out the door, and scrape by the timer to get into a class at the right time. You clock out, come home, and just have enough energy for food and then go to bed. We've all been there.

The problem is your place can amass garbage, messiness, and begins to stink. So what do you do? Well, here are some door tips for the stinky place, most of which are disappointing in their banality and in their requiring work.

Tip one: keep tidy as you can. Messiness is the single biggest source of stench in my experience. When your clothes are piling up, the stench botch is as well. So be mindful of the laundry, including bed blankets and other things bound to stink.

Tip two: do the dishes. Dishes can pile up easy. I would recommend taking the farmer approach. There's always manure. That needs to be picked up and shoveled out, daily. Make it a routine, it'll become less exhausting. The place will be less messy with fewer dishes and will not only smell less in the kitchen but also look better. Aesthetics can psychologically take away from the sensation of the stench.

Tip three: get an odor neutralizer for the bathroom. Bathrooms, let's face it, are horrifying. A place to shave and groom and pluck, to put on rouge and lipstick, and to excrete. It's just an awful, gross admixture that also is quite obviously a place in deep need of stink-be-gone. When you go to the bathroom, you can use a normal spray to neutralize any potential smells, just leave it in an obvious place. Also, it can be a simple thing for guests to use too, which, as students, is common happenstance.

Tip four: buy a vacuum cleaner. The floor, like clothes and the sheets, can build up unpleasant odors, which require regular upkeep. If you have wood floors, get a sweeper or some equivalent for it, you won't regret it. You could also look into a robotic floor cleaner if you want to invest in one to save you time.

That's not it but it is a start, so get to it!

Do you need cable?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Here's a question for all fellow college goers: do you need cable? My short answer is no. It is a bit of limb to go out on, kind of a shocker, but I want to convince you: it is not a necessity, so not a need and only one want among many. Not because you don't need it necessarily but have it as such a want as to seem like a need. Now, you can have access to YouTube and other sources of media for cheap or even free. So why not go for the free stuff or the cheap entertainment?

If you think that you need cable, then you're probably living in the 1990s, which is around the time that you were probably conceived, e.g. *Street Fighter* was big and the boy band members were the hot new items (Growl). I would pitch an idea that you don't need cable but you do need entertainment. Life would be relatively boring otherwise.

That entertainment can come in multiple forms. It can come from the concert; it can come from bowling; it can come from board games with friends. It can come from moderate and responsible drinking. It can come from various sports hobbies such as skiing, snowboarding, kayaking, running, tennis, and so on.

There are lots of things to do. The queue can seem endless. The boredom of twiddling thumbs in life, while waiting for the next exam, is not a possibility but an inevitability to be gotten through. That's why entertainment is a need and many forms of it high-level wants.

Cable is meant to provide some form of entertainment. But it is a passive and *low-level* form of entertainment, especially for a time in life when you actually have the ability to partake of higher levels of physical activity. So why not take advantage of that greater range of possibilities? Don't be a couch potato, unless you want to look like one.

Besides, these physical activities are all free for the most part, except for equipment cost. Just a bit of time, some friends, and a friendly competitive spirit to take the edge off the day to be put into a fun competition. Get out, breathe the air, play some hockey or go for a walk and talk while drinking coffees and window shopping with your girlfriends. And turn the darn television off for a bit.

If not for you, then for me on behalf of you.

Online University Life

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

If you are like me, a university student or someone in college, you have to figure out a few things about living and sustenance. Where will I live? What will eat this morning? Where will I return to once I'm done with classes?

All of this is extraordinarily important. College life or university living involves, well, a place to live. Depends on your situation and the university, for example, you can live on campus or at home. You can take courses at an online university or a bricks-and-mortar university.

For my own situation, I have to take a unique perspective because I take courses at an online university. At this university, there are multiple points of intake for courses. I can apply by the 10th of the prior month and then start taking classes on the first of the next month. For example, I can begin applying on February 10 of the year and then take courses on March 1 of that same year.

It is extraordinarily flexible for a student such as myself. I suspect the same for others, such as those who may be parents. I am not, but this is likely factor for those other students. There are decreased costs, e.g. not having to buy a car, pay for insurance, pay for gas, or have to deal with the lost time involved in travel to and from the university grounds.

So, if you are going to be getting the college apartment, and if you are taking online classes for an online degree, then the best option may be any option anywhere for a place to live.

Because you can take the courses from anywhere, so you can select any living situation, whether with others or alone, at the best price.

Read the fine print, the importance of really reading your lease

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Fine print, it's not as magical as peanut and butter, artificial and intelligence, or God and complex. But it is certainly a two-word phrase worth its weight in ink.

For the young or the immature at heart, the important crux of critical thinking enters with our own money finally invested into something...including apartments or places for rent in general.

As a binding legal document, a lease is the basis for renting; the foundation for a yes or no on stipulated terms behind a rental between a landlord (sometimes Satan, as with Ace Ventura) and their tenant (you).

The fine print is the part of the lease about specific nitty-gritties. And it doesn't start there. It starts at a single distinction based on time between two types of these written agreements of which we are assumed to be signatories.

One is shorter term. The other is longer term. Rental agreements are a kind of lease you could say but only as short term versions of them set for a one-month or few month period.

A formal lease is longer, including six months and up. That makes rental agreements six and under in months. You need to pay close attention to those details in either of them because these will say, 'Not allowed pets. This is expected behaviour or is the code of conduct. And not just of the tenant, the landlord has responsibilities as well.'

'These are the names, first, middle, and last, of this apartment's occupants.' And so on. Not an easy or particularly exhilarating read, but a need, nonetheless. The Devil really is in the details, especially regarding the security deposit and how the darn thing will be used up.

The security deposit typically is used for the purpose of fixing damage that happens by the tenants, which amounts to money the tenant pays up front.

But this money **is not** a payment; it is a lending. The money is lent by the tenant to the landlord "in the case that..." I hope that's clear.

Here's another angle. If my friend spent all his money on a newer car, and is afraid of potential damages to the car when I borrow it for a month (analogy to a rental agreement), let's say, then I sign a contract in the fine print stipulating that I will pay x dollars upfront at the beginning of the agreement for me driving.

x is paid to my friend in the case that I damage the car with reasonable expectations of damage (here's the critical thinking bit, right?) to that previously agreed upon "reasonable" amount of damage. If not, then the money is paid back from the car renter (landlord) to the tenant (me, the driver) at the end of the contract or the month, or whenever it is stipulated in the contract. Make sense?

There's lots of stuff like that. You have to be savvy. I suggest using more in-depth resources by simply Googling, Binging, or Yahooing the relevant key terms for more articles and information.

Or you can always get advice from a trusted confidante, mentor, or advisor.

You could save yourself stress and a couple hundred bucks. Sorry to sound like sad, but, “Be careful.”

Does your college credit score affect your apartment?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

You're off to college. You pay the rent. You buy foodstuffs and make your meals. You gather student debt in the process of becoming a more educated member of the population. But then a creeping problem begins to rear its head as you start to end your undergraduate training, the spectre of a bad credit score.

As students in college or university, or trade school, we should keep in mind the possibility of a bad credit score, or a good one for that matter, while in training. First of all, what is it? How do you measure it?

A credit score is the credit rating, or grading, of a prospective debtor. An evaluation of you as a potential risk for debt. What is your worth to this individual or institution, typically a bank, in lending money to you?

There is a formal ranking for this. No need for specific details, but you can Google, Bing, or Yahoo it to gather some more information on that particular matter. More generally, the debtor is given the score based on a number of variables, come from them, in order to assess their financial risk.

"Will this individual be able to pay back their debt to me, the debtor?" that is the fundamental question. The consequences of life as a modern student can lead to bad credit while in university, so as to cripple your credit rating as you leave university.

You may be juggling finances, school courses, work, various familial and friendship even relationship commitments, but this is another concern as long-term as some of them because a credit rating can forecast accessibility to financial support through debt in the future.

The answer to the opening query is "Yes." So, you best get your finances straightened out. Because there are some identifiable pressure points for risk. You should not apply for multiple accounts at once.

You need to have a payment history where you actually pay for your things. So, whatever account you get or card you use, you should use that card frequently in order to build a good credit rating. It shows reliability over a long period of time. That goes to the point of credit rating being a long-term investment.

Not only have an account history, but one showing payments of any - well - payments on time and in full. You should become an authorized user on your parents' card as well as be on the lookout for the best and most reliable roommates, if you have any, as possible - look for the Big Five trait conscientiousness. Do not co-sign with your roommates.

Finally, protect both your own identity and the relevant intimate information you may have. By focusing on some of these pressure points, you can protect your credit score or rating and your own economic future, which is important even in university.

And even if you're not an economics major!

Top 10 dogs for apartments, let's start from the bottom of the top 10

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Number 10 on my list is the Basenji. An awesome dog with lots of energy. A nice, compact dog for indoor folks such as ourselves. The coat is actually short and that is a big help while in an apartment. It is a good average starter dog for those without a lot of experience with dogs in their own place but still who love dogs to pieces.

Number 9 has to be the Beagle. What's not to like? Small, cuddly, small coat, and almost looks like it was evolved for the indoors student. Not as excitable as a Basenji mind you, but, hey, maybe that's your style.

The number 8 for me is the Border Collie. A friend of mine had two as a kid and they have a special place in my heart. They represent a dog for a small family, but have the levels of energy, cuddliness, and simply lovability of someone able to give them what it needs: food, water, and love.

7 is the Boston Terrier. "Terrifying," said no predator, or prey for that matter, animal, ever. But cute indeed, and indoors, definitely more indeed. They're only a slightly above a foot in height and weigh about 20 pounds on average. It is chaseable, feedable, and cuddleable. Get one!

Next to 6 is the Bulldog. Their hair is short, which is good for me because I am super, duper finicky about hair from dogs. It is unnecessary extra work, right? Then they're tinier and weigh less, so there is a literally less surface area for hair to fall off of...I'm just sayin'. But! They won't cause much trouble and are like the not-tough-looking but trying to be the tough kid in elementary school. They're great.

5! Phew, already halfway there. I will make this almost an honorable mention because of their Taco Bell fame through the commercials: Chihuahuas. Pretty much the kind of dog that is like the car you first buy by saving money on the paint, so you go all white. Literally only a half to a $\frac{3}{4}$ foot tall and less than 10 pounds, tops. These dogs are built to be indoors because exactly everything outside could potentially kill them. They need protection, food, love...and did I mention your admiration for how they even survived this long?

Number 4 for me is one of the curveballs, but I did do some of the research and the Brussels Griffon is a cool dog. It is something of note to me because of the stature of such a small animal. They have a puff on their face that looks like a fur explosion from there nose outward. No joke, be Millennial, Google it. They are for those with a smaller dog preference with only an average amount of energy.

On the way to the top now with the top 3, I have to go with the Chow Chow. One: the name; if people ask, you can say, "Oh, that's Mow-Mow. He's my Chow Chow." Two, or if you don't want to have fun that way with the adorable little pup, you could keep in mind their obedience, reasonable energy, and decent - did I say cuddleable? - size.

Number 2, and I won't cop out with a tie, I love the Daschund - which is a little nobler in tone than the "Wiener Dog." It is a lovely dog, loyal, somewhat bright, and hysterical when it runs around the house. They won't leave too much fur around and they are tiny, only 5 to 9 inches at the shoulder, so you could, technically if this is a concern, save money on their food bill.

The top spot dog for an apartment. The lab, I have a chocolate lab, which is a special item in my own heart because he is way, way, oversized at 110-130lbs depending on his patterns of hungry. I call him "Lunchbox," affectionately. He is old and falling apart. But he's been a fabulous investment.

Built to love and last. They come in multiple colors too, which is helpful and can be a good thing if you're picky about the coloring of the pup. He makes life bright at the price of food, water, and some petting. Easy to maintain, good for big and small apartments, and very easy to train and manage as a pet. Nothing wrong with them, really.

What to do when your apartment loses power?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

You're blasting away the last article before winter break, hoping to head home as soon as possible, and then wish to run off to the slopes for some snowboarding or skiing, or off to the coffee shop for a specialty hot chocolate with whip cream: then the power shuts off.

You didn't save the file for a couple of hours, don't know what to do, and probably don't even have a candle because you only moved into the apartment a year ago, even as early as last September. Panic.

Despair and Darkness.

What do you do?

Well, since that is a hypothetical, one of the first things to do would be to have the conscientiousness to prepare ahead of time with some materials such as candles, not just for romantic nights, lighters, manually chargeable flashlights.

Then there are the things to do if these kinds of accidents happen in any case, charge your laptop, if you have one, and your phone, so that if and almost inevitably *when* this does happen you have some digital entertainment to prevent boredom.

If you were working on your laptop and the battery isn't terrible, then you have the battery power to help you finish the article and then send it off once the power is back on rather than losing the article altogether and having to restart *once the power is back on*.

For your phone, if you have some fun games, you could play them on the apps that you downloaded ahead of time, which can help with the boredom of no electronics during a power outage. You can get lost in Mario or some other game that can pass the time. Also, you could text friends if you have a good plan and then organize something while you all wait.

That's really it. Be prepare, have alternative lights, get your storage units for relevant electronics in order so that you can be able to continue your work or be able to have some fun or organize some fun by yourself or with others.

That's it.

Best Roommates through history

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

You are looking for a place to take classes and so a place to live, but you don't want to do it alone. As you're looking at the various places to live on College Rentals, you nod off daydreaming about the possibilities of roommates. Who will I meet in my time in undergrad? You think about their possible quirks, good and bad, and what kind of compromises in personality you may have to make with them.

They're worldly, but very messy locally - like the apartment. You can have great conversations but have to pick up after them... But what about in history? Who would be a great roommate for an undergrad in history?

Think, Abe Lincoln, everyone knows him or of him. What was his big trait? He was honest. If you had an honest and upright roommate like Abe Lincoln, how cool would that be? Someone you could confide in and feel comfortable expressing your innermost fears and biggest plans - who would give honest feedback. A confidante is someone worth having in your life, and even better if they're your roommate. You would have an emotional security in person form.

Your mind may wander off into another domain like music. It drifts into the more modern era. You could be around this person when they are singing or rapping. Think about some of the biggest names now like Jay-Z or Justin Bieber, you could have one of the greatest lyricists or pop stars in the world right in your own place.

You would have Justin Bieber checking his Twitter and Facebook talking about all the Beliebers out there. Just a nice celebrity with a great, outgoing personality, you could have a lot of fun with someone like a Justine Bieber. Then with Jay-Z, you really could learn the ropes of how to hustle. Someone with a real gift for language and an acumen for business. Sharp on words and swift on negotiation, you could spend time learning how to do your own startup.

Another great person outside of honesty with Lincoln, an outgoing personality with Bieber, and learning about business with Jay-Z would be Oprah. You could talk well into the night about the issues ongoing in your dorm and relationship life. Imagine sitting down with your girlfriends trying to figure out what is going on with the cute guy in Anthropology class, then Oprah is there and she invites guests like Dr. Phil and Iyanla Vanzant to come in and give crucial life and relationship advice - and to figure out about the young man.

Between the honesty of Lincoln, the positive extroversion of Bieber, business savvy of Jay-Z, and the social skills and advice giving of Oprah, you would be set for a college life of solid roommates.

Grey is the new white

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Good Morning!

Grey is the new white. You can see that white t-shirts haven't necessarily gone out of style on guys and the black suits with white undershirts aren't disappearing anytime soon for weddings and even funerals.

But grey is still the new white. If you look at the winter fashion, there will be some white, but white is a summer weather. You know, the weird white pants on men and okay white dresses on women going to the Bahamas for an anniversary vacation. Those folks.

You can see it. But grey really is the new white, especially for early Spring and the previous period of a rather odd Winter. Grey is something that you might want to consider not only mixing into your clothing and style but also into your own apartment.

You could think about shades of grey to layer the design scheme. White has a tougher time doing that. Grey also has a certain ability to allow a room to breathe. It is a neutral, relaxing color. Nothing too elevated or chic, simplicity can be its own sophistication if done right.

And if you combine and contrast with a variety of other colors, the room may even feel collected while being spacious. And insofar as I know, the painting over a grey background might as well be painting over a blank canvas, which can make the repurposing of the coloring scheme at later times of - ahem - colorful inspiration.

Also, grey has a certain vintage feel to it in addition to being relaxing, neutral. You can think about the old black and white films and how they portrayed people.

Even if the people are colorful, like in parts of that movie *Pleasantville*, the grey looks good and can stand out.

Grey: versatile, lovable, and better than white, whether clothing or interior decor and design...grey is the new white.

3 healthy breakfast meals

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

You wake up, and want a meal, or simply even a snack. The fridge is full, but the contents are in pieces: damn. No prepared food: double damn. But you go to the internet and see this article...and you're in luck! Scott's here to help with some simple, healthy breakfast meals, morning snacks just for you:

The first idea is that if you have some oatmeal either in packets or steel cut. If you have the steel cut, it only takes some boiled water or a microwave plus some water. With the steel cut and boiled water, the process is a little bit lengthier, where I recommend a more in-depth way of doing it in about 20-30 minutes with a boil and then simmer ([here](#)).

Instant oatmeal is a little easier, as it takes water and the contents of the packets, which usually come with some extra sugar to sweeten the meal a bit more. Oatmeal is great and fibre-based breakfast for the morning.

Whatever means by which you take those in after cooking, they all have the same nutritional value – apart from the added sugar in the instant oatmeal – because they come from the same source. You can always add some sugar or honey if you want to sweeten the oatmeal some more, but, as with butter, it is extra calories and will be accounted for later either in the waistline or the diminishment of the total caloric allowance for the rest of the day.

Another healthy meal is not going to be a salad because this – granted a healthy meal but – not a quick morning meal. If you have the time, then the world is your oyster with the appropriate ingredients for a salad. The next meal on the docket would be a Seinfeldian trope: a bowl of cereal.

No, not you Fruit Loops, I am looking to the fortified and fibre-based cereals that have the healthy or good fats and the fibre content to make the meal worthwhile because, bear in mind, the more fibre and protein in a meal then the longer that you will feel full.

So, something like a bowl of Fibre One Original, Kashi Honey Puffs, or Kellogg Special K Protein, and others. Each of these can provide nutrition, whether vitamins and minerals, protein, or fibre, and can keep you going well into the later morning and early afternoon – just add a cup of Joe, or Joanne, (coffee) on the side.

The third one is a tiny bit complicated, but would be well worth it – as it can be both a meal and a snack. If you have some blueberries, or mixed berries, some low fat Greek yogurt, skim milk, and even a teeny bit of cocoa, then you have the makings of a nice smoothie.

Just add blender – I have that backwards, but you get the idea. So don't despair, as the proper nutrition is right around the corner for you, and the proper meal is in the fridge when you get them; all you have to do is put it together, which, frankly, doesn't take that much work...after all.

Things that are NOT dishwasher safe

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

There are a lot of things that come in handy with modern appliances, such as the dishwasher, including the ability to take more time devoting oneself to other activities. But! There is the unfortunate necessity for extra caution and concern about even the minor things that fall under banner of convenience.

The dishwasher being no different. And being a washer of dishes and associated things, the caution and concern are oriented around only a few items. Some you'll likely have on hand, in-house; others, you will probably not have exact access too.

If you have good kitchen knives, it is advisable not to use the dishwasher because this can reduce the quality of the knives. Then there is the case of the cast iron objects, which could have their protection removed from the process and could, and eventually will, rust.

You should look into manufacturer warnings regarding wood cooking tools or utensils because the process of a dishwasher washing is a rather rigorous process, depending on setting, and could crack the wood.

Gold-covered or colored things will become dull over time; their glistening will be a fading. The non-stick pots and pans have the same issues, almost, with the cast iron ones. They have a coating, which could be washing sufficiently roughly to come off entirely or even partly.

Hollow handle knives should be given extra caution and concern because of the way that they can detach from their handles, so the blade can be loose. Let's say the handle and blade detached from one another and the blade is now unattached not in the original place and crammed in an awkward place, you reach in. Ouch!

You can draw blood from a deep cut. It is a main kitchen knife after all. Plastic containers are another one. You should check the labelling of the plastic and the manufacturer of the dishwasher to see if the plastic type could handle it.

Even if the plastic can handle it, the focus should be on the top rack for the plastic that can handle the heat and wear and tear of the dishwashing cycle. Cans and bottles with labels can have the glue heat up, and fall into the interior of the dishwasher and even clog the drain.

It is important to not let that happen. Out of those, if you take sufficient precaution and wash those things by hand, say, then you shouldn't have too much trouble with the dishwasher and can have the benefit of one of the better timesavers alongside the washer and dryer for clothes.

Should you hire a dog walker?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

When it comes to having a pet, you always have the positives of having the pet, which is simply fun. Dogs are loving, compassionate, and adorable pillows with legs. You can't not love them. They are as irresistible to love as much as Stevie Wonder's voice. They are just soothing.

But they do come with some problem areas because they are living beings. They eat, drink, sleep, poop, and need daily exercise. If they do not get those, as with most beings, they go a little looney, especially if they need that exercise to get around and live out their days.

The big problems have been largely solved because so many people have dogs and love them, even treating them probably in most cases as another member of the family if not another child or sibling. Dogs are great and often well-loved.

You can get prepackaged food just for their specific nutritional needs, even treat wants. You can buy them collars and beds and leashes and other toys/accessories to help improve their quality of life. You can have a specific poop bag or shovel and bucket to manage the waste product of the dogs. You can buy them special beds for sleep. Through those, you have all of their needs met, except the need to be outside - which for most dogs is a definite need.

You basically check the box on dogs needing walking regardless of type and then read the fine print about "How much?" Some need a lot; some need a little. But nonetheless, the ability to be able to take a dog out can be a hassle as with other chores *because they are chores*.

That is where dogwalkers come in. You can go on walks or runs with the dog if you would love to get your own outdoors needs as a living, breathing being too. But if you do not have time for that because you work, as with many students, or because of classes and time constraints, even energy limitations, then you may seriously want to consider a dog walker to help you manage that chore, that responsibility.

You have responsibilities, but want the benefits of a friendly house pillow that barks. One of the best things to do then is to set some finances aside to either completely or partially help with the responsibility, out of care and concern and compassion for the dog, of walking the dog.

It doesn't take much. You can put out an ad online or even within the campus community to hire someone to help you with your responsibilities to the dog. So, you can have some time to yourself, more flexibility with your work, or be able to attend the class without worrying about Pebbles.

It is one way that you don't have to be stuck between a rock and a hard place getting help through a dog walker. And if all else fails, find a friend, or befriend and make a friend, someone who simply cannot help but gush poetic for animals in general – and hopefully dogs in particular, you can see if they can *volunteer* for the dog walking responsibilities, which does a favor for you and for them at the same time in a win-win.

You get more time. They get a dog for a bit. Whether you hire someone, or get help from a friend, you can't go wrong with a dog walker to help take Rocky to the park

Should you join clubs at your university?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Let's say you are settled into the dorm, know the personalities that you will be dealing with for the next semester or longer, have become acquainted with the geography of the campus and can figure out how to plan your meals for the day and the class schedule alongside that too. What now? You have some extra time. You want to cram in as much undergraduate time into your own life as possible.

You have some time, but do not know how to spend it. Your friends are busy. You have done your homework, had lunch and the rest of the day is ahead of you. What do you do? You can look into clubs. If you look on the university website or the university student union website, then you can see the list of student clubs.

If you have trouble finding the list for the website, please look for an administrator or an assistance from the appropriate part of the university student union to help find the link. They are elected student officials, so they are beholden in service to you!

Once you find the right listing, and have time to look through them, you obviously have already decided that these are something worth pursuing by taking the time to go this far into the process - if not just for curiosity for what is one offer or for a peek into the campus culture.

But you can see the varieties of fellow students' experiences with a potential offer for you. You can find offerings for varieties of faiths and non-faith groups. Whether Orthodox or Reformed Judaism or Humanist clubs, or debate club, a chess club, a video gamer club, a political club like Model United Nations, or a travel group's club devoted to one of those "go see the Amazon" deals, and so on, the number will depend on the size of the student body and activity of the student community as well.

Do you want to become involved in the psychology community there? Then you need to look into the psychology society or association on campus because, maybe, you can find some connections into the research labs and other professional opportunities at the same time.

Should you be involved in the clubs on campus? You probably should. It can brighten an otherwise difficult academic experience with some variety in experience and may even benefit professional experience as well.

But once you made the choice, found the resources, and have chosen a club or few, how do you join and become involved? There is usually an email or a Facebook group with the possibility for direct messaging. If they do not have direct contact, you can always use those contact points to relay to the more relevant people responsible for membership within the group.

This is important to remember and can be an important life skill. If you do not have direct access to the right people, you can find your way to the right people with some effort and a little social finesse. From those valuable indirect contacts, you can then find the right people within the club.

Also, let's say even after all of that time and effort, you find that you cannot find the right contact for the club or even a club that interests you. You just found another great area in which to contribute to the campus life.

You can take on a leadership role and then begin your own club. You simply a sufficient number of people signing on, a title and goal of the club, and then have to fill in the appropriate papers.

Once filled in and submitted to the university student union, you can begin your own club and can then be that resource for others, who will try to reach you through email or Facebook.

Try it out!

Check Your Head

Volunteer Stories: An Interview with Justin Rawlins

October 11, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

As the Youth Blog Coordinator, Justin Rawlins has been an amazing part of our Check Your Head team over this past year. He was one of our 2015 Volunteers of the Year and we're sad to say farewell to him this fall as he moves onto new projects.

In this blog post, youth blogger Scott Douglas Jacobsen chats with Justin about his involvement with Check Your Head.

How did you find us at Check Your Head (CYH)?

A friend sent me the callout for CYH's Democracy Check campaign, which focused on engaging young people in BC through digital media in the build up to the 42nd federal election. People can check out the Democracy Check archive to see some of the interesting and creative work that emerged from that campaign.

After the election, CYH was looking for a blog coordinator. I had such a positive experience with CYH during Democracy Check, so I volunteered for the position. And that was a year ago.

What tasks and responsibilities come along with your position at CYH?

The blog coordinator is responsible for recruiting volunteer bloggers and then coordinating and editing submissions. Most submissions go through multiple rounds of revisions, not because they are poor or deficient in some way, but in order to encourage writers to grapple with their ideas a bit longer.

What is the content and purpose of the written work through CYH – by others and yourself?

There are multiple purposes, but the one that I want to highlight is CYH's blog as a platform for young people across BC to showcase some of their thoughts on the most pressing issues of our time. I was pleased with the quality and thoughtfulness of the submissions that I received on topics ranging from technological change to migrant justice to poverty to gentrification and beyond.

Did your education assist in writing your own work and editing others' work for the blog?

I was a teaching assistant during my graduate studies, which prepared me for email exchanges and written feedback. I also learned a lot from Tahia and Aleks (former CYH staff members) during the orientation for Democracy Check, especially on how to interact with volunteers, because both of them are excellent facilitators and educators.

Also, university exposed me to a lot of different thinkers whose work I find useful for making sense of the world. I was able to pass some of that along to the volunteer bloggers, such as directing people to Edward Said's work on Orientalism and imperialism or Ananya Roy's work on poverty.

What is your post-secondary education in?

I completed a BA at SFU in political science and an MA in sociology. My MA thesis looked at the interconnectedness of urban and rural issues in Ankara, Turkey, with a focus on wheat cultivation and mass housing. More recently, I'm completing pre-requisite science courses, with the aim of gaining admittance to a physical therapy program.

What are some impacts you have seen in BC from the work of CYH – at all levels?

So much of formal education, especially at the high school level, is sanitized and avoids uncomfortable topics or presents them in a neutral way that justifies or entrenches existing power dynamics. CYH does a good job of unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions and a good example of that is their recent Inclusion and Anti-Racism project.

Also, CYH works with other organizations engaged in important struggles, such as the BC Health Coalition. I mention the BC Health Coalition because they have been a key player in confronting Dr. Brian Day's legal push for increased private health care, a push that would fundamentally undermine public health care in Canada. And CYH has an informative health care workshop that unpacks some of the issues surrounding health care in general and privatized health care in particular.

Where do you hope CYH goes into the future?

This isn't specific to CYH, but I would like to see the rules surrounding the political activities of charities in Canada revised, so that charities involved in advocacy work no longer need to fear costly CRA audits. The current restrictions are nebulous and stifle dissent.

I hope CYH continues to reach young people whose curiosities about the world are not necessarily being met through formal education. Young people are not apathetic—contrary to popular belief—but many do appear to possess a healthy suspicion about the old ways of doing things. CYH's workshops and projects encourage young people to pursue their curiosities and imagine new ways of doing things. To paraphrase Paulo Freire: education changes people and people change the world. CYH will continue to educate and activate young people on social issues.

British Columbia's Responsibilities to Climate Change Action

October 27, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

The Anthropocene, or the Capitalocene, is upon us, like a lumbering giant destroying Downtown Vancouver in its wake, especially for the collective global future to come very soon. British Columbia needs rapid action on transition to renewable energy source. Climate change is a global issue. By implication, it has national and provincial impacts, which means that British Columbia at large is impacted, too. British Columbians by being Canadians have responsibilities to the international community because Canada has responsibilities to the international community. Outside of the international responsibilities, there are individual choices as well. Lifestyle and policy voting are important. All factors and motions for sustainability matter.

We need to work to end carbon emissions as much as possible, as fast as possible, with transitions to renewable energies. We need to get away from fossil fuel sources in Canada, and British Columbia by implication. Individuals can vote for a carbon tax that can mean a national policy can reflect this. Governments function on the 'will' of the people. That means the consistent voting and activism. That's how all change ever happens: through individuals getting together for collective efforts. There has been progress, but more needs to be done by us. One possible major solution is a provincial call for a price on carbon emissions, which can come in many forms.

There can be investments for massive public transportation that can reduce the amount of net carbon emissions by citizens within the province in addition to providing the needed infrastructure for the 21st-century. We can invest in a 'Green Culture' and a low-carbon infrastructure. There should be efficient vehicles with regulated standards. It can be expanded to other products consumers are buying.

Residents within British Columbia can travel in more efficient ways by using cars less. There are many options: taking more walks, riding a bike, taking the train, riding the bus, and so on. This may create problems for some high travel people. However, for others, and in fact probably most, it can be done. Through responsible, considerate, and conscientious decisions about transportation, we can reduce the net carbon emissions of all residents within the province.

Human activity is the main problem. The climate began to warm rapidly at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. High hydrocarbon producing fuel sources are a problem. Energy sectors depend on them for sustained economic growth and activity. I say this in sympathy for the difficulties to make such transition, for the employees, the managers, the businesses, and the communities built largely around them. However, with the Anthropocene/Capitalocene epoch present before us, and with massive species extinctions happening, we do not have another choice about avoiding the outcomes of this problem.

We do have choices about the means through which to do it. We are lucky. There are many, many options on the table. Canadian industry creates 35% of Canada's net greenhouse gases, which is quite a lot. Furthermore, small numbers of industries create most emissions. Things like oil and gas extractors are some of the largest contributors, which comes to about 38% of that 35% of industry.

The simplest solution to become involved: get educated. Education at the individual level with provincial assistance is one way to keep things moving forward. It will take all of us together, but depends on individual effort for oneself and in inspiring others. This can be done at the individual level by going to your local library or bookstore to find and read books that have relevant and reliable information about climate change and sustainability. Business people can incorporate the readings and knowledge into the business practices of whatever business you have. So this can be both short- and long-term with respect to implementation. There can also be intervention in the economy through tax.

A carbon tax is the typical term for it: pricing carbon emissions to incentivize governments, and provincial and local, to transition into the future energy sector. This can facilitate the incentives of movement towards a renewable economy and infrastructure across the province. These are some possible solutions. What will happen if we do not implement any possible solutions? There will be many negative effects, such as a negative effect on water sources. A world, or a province for that matter, scarce in fresh water can create tensions among communities and adversely affect health.

This is because water connects to both the food and the health of communities and individuals. It is the lifeblood of an ecosystem. For example, water quality, air quality, food quality, and so on, impact lung health, gut health, and so on. For those with children, this can affect their health as well. For those with community-oriented minds, this means one's own health, as well as one's neighbours, children, and grandchildren. In a broader sense of family, this affects the family of British Columbia. In that light, it both can't and shouldn't be ignored.

The individual and provincial responsibilities form an interconnected system of responsibilities from individual self-education and provincial educational programs and everything in between. To flatter ourselves, this includes youth-oriented organizations such as Check Your Head through writing about topics of importance to current, upcoming, and soon-to-exist generations. Education is an act, but it is not activism. Education with an impact can be the catalyst. That's where things begin. Individuals are inspired to act, make further impacts, and make the necessary changes.

An Interview with a Welfare Food Challenge Participant David Kerruish

November 3, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

In this post, youth blogger Scott chats with David Kerruish. David was born in Australia, but found home in Vancouver in 2011. He is a Strategic Management Consultant at Vancity, with degrees from Queensland University of Technology. This year, David took part in the Welfare Food Challenge.

How did you get involved in the Welfare Food Challenge?

I am involved with Raise the Rates through the community foundation. I heard about it the last couple of years. I thought, “My work is to find out what’s going on in the community.” I am deeply curious about it.

Knowing the purpose and meaning behind the campaign, I thought I should develop my own understanding by being a part of the campaign.

What have you heard from others that have been a part of it?

It was quite an experience. Most people found it challenging. All the way from approaching shopping with \$18 per week to the shopping itself. The ability to function when perpetually hungry and malnourished comes with a sobering realization.

This is the way thousands of people live every week. We can check out at any point in time or after a week.

We have these welfare rates. They haven’t gone up in 9 years. I have been in Canada for 6 years. In my entire time in Canada, there’s not been an increase in the rate. I find that a little bit sad.

What was your own experience in being able to or trying to function in taking part in this, being hungry all of the time?

I am a management consultant. I do reading and writing a lot. I use my brain a lot. I found on day 4 that I was agitated, even within 48 hours. It was affecting daily function.

As I went further along, I could facilitate and be present in a conversation. However, I wasn’t able to concentrate, especially reading material. I kept thinking about eating. It was a constant cycle of planning for eating. It was not a pleasant experience at all.

What were some of the precautions others and you took before taking part in this?

I tend to be health conscious. It is making sure there’s a balance of having enough carbohydrates, proteins, mixes of vitamin and minerals as best I could. If I have some foods, it is making sure there’s the right balance.

There is no precaution, it is hard to prepare. I realize how privileged I am. It is not easy.

What are some ways fellow citizens can help others through things such as food programs for nutritious meals to eat everyday?

Food banks. I'm not sure if there is a mandate. I believe the opportunity is there for everyone to think about where they put their own money.

Are we supporting out local community with our choices in where we shop, where we spend our money throughout the day?

I think that's more challenging because we live in a culture of instant gratification and immediate result. It may not have the immediate impact, but there's the opportunity for everyone.

This is an annual event. How can people become involved?

There's a lot of work you can do to support Raise the Rates by advocating for raising the minimum wage and the welfare rate. Getting involved in the campaign is one, I was conflicted in my participation, not only because I was the guy with a fast metabolism affected by it.

I engaged with somebody on Twitter, who is on welfare for 52 weeks of the year. She made a good point. Maybe, it shouldn't be me or any of the other people that participated in the challenge. It should be people living in the state and without the opportunity to opt out.

That was my conflict. Supporting Raise the Rates is a great thing, I would encourage everyone to do that. If you think it is right for you, then advocate for the change, but also remain humble and realize thousands of people who have no choice but to complete the 'Welfare Food Challenge' every week.

Thank you for your time, David.

Lifespan Cognition Lab

Amanda V. Tabert Lifespan Cognition Lab Interview

June 20, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Tell us about brief background – education, family, and work.

My mother is Taiwanese, and my father is Canadian. I was born and raised in Taiwan until I was 11, and then I moved to Canada permanently to live with my father. I had forgotten most of my English by then (Chinese-Mandarin is my mother-tongue), so I ended up re-learning it with an English dictionary and some *Harry Potter* books (motivation can be unwavering when you're desperate to know what happens next in a story). I finished high school a little later than the average educated-folks due to my language barrier, but there was nothing I wanted more than to go to school and learn psychology, so I pushed myself through high school while financially supporting myself – the work paid off.

Your research interest is in forensic psychology. In particular, the manner in which context can create cognitive biases and the impacts of these cognitive biases on the legal system. For example, the reliability of eyewitness testimonies and the possibility for cognitive contamination in forensic experts based on the context. Why forensic psychology?

I've always been fascinated with the intersection between psychology and the legal system – I want to work with those who are in trouble with the law. My main interest is in providing rehabilitative treatment in correctional facilities, but providing assessments, giving expert testimony, and evaluating competency to stand trial is also appealing to me.

With respect to, and between, cognitive biases, eyewitness testimonies, cognitive contamination, and the legal system, what unified theme contains the most fascination for you?

If I had to pick the one discovery in psychology that surprised me the most about the human mind, is just how delicate it can be to cognitive bias. And since the legal system is where I find psychology to be most stimulating, I prefer to study cognitive bias in people who work for or with the law.

You are an undergraduate at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and the Kwantlen Polytechnic Psychology Society. You research in Dr. Daniel Bernstein's Lifespan Cognition Lab and Dr. Karen Parhar's Crime Desistance Lab. How do these psychology 'labs' promote ability, knowledge, and skill development towards the research interest in forensic psychology?

If it wasn't for these labs, I probably would never have discovered my passion for research – which is why they play a vital role in my academic progress. Of course it is important to attend classes, write papers and pass exams, but you are constantly putting your knowledge to work in the lab. Lifespan Cognition Lab was the first one I joined; it was Dr. Bernstein and the other research assistants who sparked my curiosity in research because they encouraged me to attend psychology conferences and to get actively involved with research projects. In Dr. Parhar's Crime Desistance Lab, I get to sharpen my interviewing skills by talking to ex-offenders about

their previous run-ins with the law and their reintegration into society. I believe these labs are absolutely essential for students to solidify what they learn in classes, and also to get ready for graduate school.

You work on a hindsight bias and confirmation bias project with Dr. Daniel Bernstein and Dr. Itiel Dror. What is the research question and state of the project?

Well, we're still collecting data for the project, and since I'm only the research assistant, I'm not actually sure how much I can give away!

Regarding forensic psychology, the research with Drs. Bernstein, Parhar, and Dror, and research on hindsight bias and confirmation bias, what are the next steps for 2016 and in the years to come for you?

Well, I will be officially starting my honours program this September, and will complete it in the spring of 2017. I will still be a 3rd year student by the time the honours program ends, so I'm looking at graduation perhaps around early 2018. After that, off to work on my master's degree. And after that, I will be looking at a doctoral degree. I know many people who cringe at the thought of the years to come after their bachelor's degree – don't get me wrong, I'm expecting some tears and coffee-addiction, but I absolutely love school, and cannot wait to bring it on.

Cory S. Callies Lifespan Cognition Lab Interview

August 3, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Tell us about your brief background – education, family, and work.

I ended up moving a few times during my teenage years due to my Fathers work. He has a career as a long-haul truck driver and lives in Alberta with my mom. I graduated high school at Langley Education Center (LEC), which is attached to Langley Secondary School. The school counselor at LEC encouraged me to attend a workshop on school counseling, which started my interest for psychology.

You are a third-year student at Kwantlen Polytechnic University with the intention to complete a Major in Psychology and a Minor in Counseling. Why psychology coupled with counseling?

The reason I am pursuing a minor in counseling is my interest in helping people. If I want to become an effective clinical psychologist, I need proper counseling skills. Well, a minor in counseling will not necessarily give me those practical skills, but it is a step in the right direction.

You are the project manager for the Lifespan Cognition Lab of Dr. Daniel Bernstein. What tasks and responsibilities come with this position?

As the project manager, I really work as a jack-of-all-trades. I am responsible for training new research assistants, scheduling, and recruiting participants for our study. Recruiting involves working with advertisements and calling perspective participants, I have a responsibility to make sure the project is on the right track, but it could not be done without the other research assistants, Dr. Daniel Bernstein, and Eric Mah.

You have experiences relevant to clinical psychologists with at-risk children and addiction. What are these experiences?

Growing up, I watched many of the families and acquaintances struggle with drug addictions, or broken families. At the time, I was a naïve child, so I did not fully understand what was going on around me. However, as I grew up, I had a real revelation on how the world works. I think that having real world experience in some of the issues clients are facing will be help me understand, and better treat them.

You want to help the ill, too. How do these experiences relate to clinical psychology and wanting to help the ill?

As a clinical psychologist, I intend to work in a hospital and help treat the mentally ill. Some forms of mental illness like schizophrenia, bipolar, and depression can have huge negative impacts on the lives of others. By helping to treat these serious mental illnesses, I hope to better the client's lives, as well as the lives of their families.

You have research interests in autism spectrum disorder, addiction, and addictions counseling. What makes these interesting research topics?

I find it interesting that although we all have a brain, some small differences in them can cause such a massive effect. I want to be able to better understand others, and the issues that they face in life, and understanding how the brain functions is a good place to start.

In regards to addictions, I find it interesting that basic needs can be overlooked for non-essential drugs. People give up their whole lives to chase a drug, which is the sad reality that some people face every day, and I want to understand how to change these people for the better.

What role do the mentioned experiences with at-risk children and addiction, and the research interests in autism spectrum disorder, addiction, and addictions counseling align with the aim to enter graduate school in clinical psychology?

My original intention going into University was to become a school counselor. My school counselor really helped me, and I thought that by helping kids achieve their goals, I could positively influence their lives, and help them through difficult problems they face. Some of which could be family troubles, or drug addictions, even mental health issues.

After seeing the damages addictions and mental illnesses do to families, I decided I wanted to tackle the issue in a more direct matter. School counselors may fill a lot of their time with course selection, and not actual counseling work. That is why I aim to graduate with a degree in clinical psychology, so I can obtain the skills, and qualifications to work directly with mental illnesses, or drug addictions.

What are the next steps for 2016 and in the years to come for you?

I like to set goals for myself to complete that are simple and concrete, and that work towards future goals that may be broader. My goal for this year is to strengthen my research skills, by taking research methods and statistics. Statistics is one of my weaker points, and I would like to strengthen these areas, to better help my colleagues.

With everybody looking into taking the GRE's I was also planning to brush up on my basics, to better prepare myself for the future. In the long term, I would like to start looking into potential advisors for my degree in clinical psychology.

It is a very competitive degree, and getting accepted into the program of your choice is difficult. If I can make a good impression on an advisor, I drastically increase my chances of getting into a program of my choice, with an advisor that shares the same interests as I do.

Eric Mah Lifespan Cognition Lab Interview

August 3, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Tell us about your brief background – education, family, and work.

My family is from Vancouver; I was born here but lived in the states for a good ~10 years before we moved back up to Canada. After that, the standard high school and first retail job before KPU. I have had the good fortune to have parents who have been willing to provide financial support for my education as well as professors who have given me opportunities to do field-relevant RA work throughout my undergraduate career. Through these professors I've been able to work on interesting projects, attend conferences, and draft and submit manuscripts.

Your main research interests are social and cognitive psychology. Why social and cognitive psychology?

I like the social and cognitive areas because they provide the frameworks to look at the beliefs and behaviours that dictate how people interact with each other in day-to-day life: attitudes and prejudices, influence and persuasion, fallacies, biases, and heuristics among others. I find fallacies (e.g., the gambler's fallacy) and biases (e.g., attribution errors) particularly interesting because they offer some insight into why people make terrible decisions (and how we might prevent this). I also like these areas because they are broad enough that I have a lot of freedom to try out a variety of research questions.

Furthermore, you focus on topics of interest as these come into academic and intellectual purview. At the moment, this means the intersection between philosophy and psychology. Why the intersection between philosophy and psychology?

I have always liked philosophy; it asks the really big, fascinating questions and is conducive to really engaging debates and critical thinking. However, I have also wondered how relevant these philosophical questions are in everyday life. Along these lines, I did my honours thesis on how belief or disbelief in free will affects how people think about their life goals. For example, you might expect that reducing people's beliefs in free will could cause them to view their goals as less under their control (spoilers: it didn't). In future research, I'd like to look at how laypeople think about other philosophical questions—e.g., What is personal identity? What is the nature of reality? How much can we truly know?—and see how their answers influence everyday thinking and behaviour, if at all. Also, a lot of questions in philosophy are inherently untestable and probably unanswerable through philosophy alone so I'd like to explore them in a more scientific capacity.

You graduated from Kwantlen Polytechnic University with a Major in Psychology and a Minor in Philosophy. You are the lab manager for the Lifespan Cognition Lab of Dr. Daniel Bernstein. What tasks and responsibilities come with this position?

As the lab manager, I recruit and interview RA's, buy materials for the lab, make sure lab research projects don't conflict in terms of scheduling, coordinate lab meetings, handle website stuff and overall ensure things are running smoothly. Honestly, I don't do a lot of managing; the Lifespan Cognition Lab is full of brilliant, hardworking, capable and independent RA's who

regularly design and direct full research projects under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Bernstein. It has been a great experience working with the team thus far.

You research risky decision-making from the same lab. What is the status of the research at this point in time?

I'm currently waiting on ethics approval for my first study on risky decision-making. I'll be looking at how people make decisions on a gambling task when the stakes are fake money or smiley faces to see if different hypothetical stimuli affect risk-taking behaviour.

You research with Dr. Roger Tweed on positive psychology through the topic of faith in humanity. What defines "faith in humanity"? What is the research question? What is the status of this research?

One of the issues with faith in humanity is that it has been poorly defined (for the most part) in the literature. Dr. Tweed and I argue that faith in humanity is best defined as a focus on and tendency to see the good in people—their strengths and virtues. This definition is very similar to the central idea of positive psychology: a focus on promoting well-being rather than treating pathology, and we argue that faith in humanity should be a core focus of positive psychology. We're currently working on writing this up as a review paper.

You research judgment/decision-making in gambling behaviour, too. What theme unites positive psychology with respect to faith in humanity, judgement/decision-making in gambling behaviour, and risky decision-making research within social and cognitive psychology?

I find them interesting! I can't really think of any big theme that unites these areas other than the (very broad) fact that they deal with how peoples' beliefs affect their behaviour.

What are the next steps for 2016 and in the years to come for you?

I'll be going through the arduous process of grad school application this fall and will hopefully be starting on my Masters the year after that. Aside from that I plan to continue working with Dr. Bernstein, Dr. Tweed, and the rest of my KPU colleagues for as long as possible.

Dr. Daniel M. Bernstein Lifespan Cognition Lab

Interview

August 21, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

What's your family story?

My grandparents were born in New York, in the United States – at least 3 out of 4 of them. My father's father was born in Poland. My great grandparents were all European: German, Ukrainian, and Polish.

My parents were childhood sweethearts. They married in their early 20s. My brother was born early in the marriage at age 23. After my brother was born, they moved to California. My sister was born two years after my brother. I was born two years after my sister.

My father was an accountant and business manager. My mother was a speech pathologist and instructor at Pepperdine University.

What's your story?

I was born in North Hollywood, California. My parents were from the Bronx, New York. I am the youngest of 3 children. Uneventful childhood, I moved to the beach from North Hollywood to Malibu at age 5. I spent my formative years at the beach.

However, I was interested in school too. I was a serious student since grade 4. I went to Beverly Hills High School for grades 10-12, but I never fit. I went to UC Berkley for undergraduate. I fit there; not only in the university, but living in the city.

After I finished the BA, I moved to Hawaii as an early retirement. I had the physical ability to enjoy Hawaii. That was a childhood dream of mine. I didn't know what I'd do after the undergraduate degree.

I did an honors degree. I designed my own major in sleep and dream studies with the help of my advisor, Arnie Leiman. He was very influential in my career. As an undergraduate student, I wasn't interested in graduate school, wasn't sure about it.

While in Hawaii, I mountain biked, surfed, and worked as a baker. I pondered my future. I decided what I was doing wasn't the future for me. So, I applied to graduate school. I went to the mainland. I lived in Santa Cruz, California for a bit.

I didn't get into graduate school the first application. I applied to four schools the following year. I re-took the Graduate Record Examination. I needed to increase my GRE scores to get into graduate school.

I was admitted to a terminal master's program at Brock University in Ontario. I knew little about the school. There were several people on a small faculty studying sleep and dreams. So, I went to Brock for two years, did my masters in Psychology, and had an amazing time.

We were the first graduate students in their new graduate program. We were very, very well treated. We had tons of opportunities. I found that to be an amazing educational experience. After the masters, I applied to PhD programs. I headed out to Vancouver.

I got into Simon Fraser University. That's where I did my PhD. I worked with someone called Vito Modigliani, who was near the end of his career, and then switched over to Bruce Whittlesea.

I finished my PhD in 2001 and headed to the University of Washington to do a Postdoc with Beth and Geoff Loftus and Andrew Meltzoff. Beth Loftus subsequently moved to UC Irvine, but we continued to work together for the duration of the Postdoc. I was at the University of Washington for 4 years. In 2005 I got a job at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, which is where I am now!

What was the original interest in psychology? What are your current interests in psychology?

Lifespan cognition, that comes from my Postdoc work with Andy Meltzoff and Geoff Loftus. Andy Meltzoff is a developmental psychologist. He was influential in my current interest.

He was interested in cognition through adults, but most of his research was on infants and preschoolers. I broadened the scope to include older adults.

Along the way, I became interested in lifespan cognition. For my PhD I did a dissertation on memory. All young adults, convenience samples from the university population. Lifespan cognition was a real change for me.

My PhD supervisor, Bruce Whittlesea, told me, "I am not interested in individual differences." Lifespan cognition is about individual difference. How do different ages perform on different tasks?

He said, "The field of Cognitive Psychology has no real use for individual differences research. Even though some people do it, it is not of interest to most Cognitive Psychologists."

I have come to conclude the opposite. To understand cognition, we have to study it developmentally with as large a lifespan as we can test. So, that's one main focus of my current research.

My other focus is on memory. It continues work started during my PhD and Postdoc. In particular, false memory with Beth Loftus. I am still doing work on false memory and on memory illusions/cognitive illusions.

Broadly construed, most of the work I do now is on cognitive biases and illusions, or how we make systematic errors in our thinking.

You earned the Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Lifespan Cognition. You are an instructor at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. What tasks and responsibilities come with this position?

The administrative reporting requirements of this position aren't too heavy, but they're regular. I have to keep the Canadian government informed on what I'm doing and the progress I'm making. Additionally, the research is on lifespan cognition.

The Canada Research Chair supports that work. That means running a lab, making sure the projects are running smoothly, and getting people into the lab/recruitment. Recruitment is difficult for this work.

Also, I need to keep on top of things any given day/week: subject recruitment, data entry, data analysis, tested populations that find the task onerous, and so on. This does not include all of the background/pilot work we did before the main research.

What is the importance of mentoring and mentorship?

Critical. The more I do it, the more I realize it's probably the most important thing that I do. It's the area where I can have the biggest impact.

I strive to ensure that students get the training they deserve and want, and help them achieve the goals that they've set for themselves.

I've just returned from a 3-month trip to Europe. I was teaching and doing research at the University of Mannheim for two of those months. Most of the work was in class teaching once a week. The rest of the time was meeting with students, Postdocs and fellow faculty to discuss research.

I loved these meetings. I do this at Kwantlen as well. I meet with students regularly. I supervise several students simultaneously. I meet with students individually and in groups. I find these research meetings to be the most rewarding part of my job.

Where do you hope your research will go into the future?

I don't know. I won't know that until I see the results of our current work. The current project for the Canada Research Chair—also funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada—is a 4-year longitudinal study of lifespan cognition.

The project focuses on perspective taking, executive function, and decision-making from preschool to old age. Because it is longitudinal, we have people return once a year for four years.

I don't know the results yet. I hope to find some interesting things that spur further questions for me and others to explore.

Often, my work is a function of what I am finding at any particular time in my research. Because the current project is a 4-year longitudinal study, I won't know the next step until I finish the study.

As for my research on memory and cognitive illusions, I would like to see more unification of these cognitive illusions over time. I'd like to see someone develop a unified explanation of the different ways in which the human mind errs in its thinking.

I don't know if I have the mind to develop this unified explanation, but maybe I'll try. I am excited, though, wherever my research takes me.

What do you consider the single greatest finding in cognitive science?

Wow – I don't know. I'm tempted to say work linking individual neurons. It goes back to Hubel and Wiesel. They won the Nobel Prize for work on the striate cortex in cats, where particular neurons respond to particular visual features in the world.

That's been shown in other sensory domains as well. There's some very cool work linking the individual firing of neurons to perception. What's most striking about this work is that you can create and even override perception by manually stimulating neurons, that's incredibly cool.

What is consciousness?

A really, really hard problem. (Laughs)

(Laughs)

Awareness of one's surroundings, of one's thoughts. That's meta-awareness. It's a very hard problem. I don't even want to try and define it. Every time I try, my definitions are unsatisfactory.

What are qualia?

To me, the sensations or the perceptions, either the physical sensations that one experiences or the perceptions that one has about those sensations. I link qualia to sensation and perception.

What is free will?

In a simple sense, it is being able to choose the direction of your path in the world rather than being controlled or determined by the physical laws of the universe. Ultimately, as when you asked me about the most interesting discovery in cognitive science, what I mentioned is determinism in a nutshell: neurons firing determine our sensation and perception. We can override perception by stimulating neurons. Imagine the following experiment.

The simplest version is to show an array of arrows that point in different directions, say 45-degrees to the right pointing upward, and 45-degrees to the right pointing downward. The task is to respond when more than 50% of the arrows in the display point in one direction.

The subject's task is to look in the direction where the majority of arrows point. You can be trained on this. The original work was done on rhesus monkeys. It takes lots and lots of training, but the monkeys can learn the task well-enough to be able to discern about 51% of a display pointing in one direction.

Assume that 51% of the arrows point upward and to the right, and the remaining 49% of the arrows point downward and to the right. You've trained the monkey to look upward and to the right on this trial because that's the direction where the majority (50% or more) of arrows are pointing.

The monkey looks up and right. You are recording from neurons that respond to arrows pointing in a particular direction. You map the cortex to determine which neurons respond to a particular line orientation.

You present the display where 51% of the arrows are pointing upward and to the right. The monkey is supposed to look upward right. However, you're manually stimulating the neurons that respond to arrows pointing downward and to the right. The monkey, in this case, will look downward and to the right.

You can override the actual sensory information by stimulating the neurons that respond to arrows pointing in another direction. The monkey will look down-right rather than up-right. To me, that is deterministic.

The neurons firing will determine perception and our experience. It's spooky, but it's incredibly cool. So, free will in a sense is being able to choose for yourself. Given what I've told you, it's hard to reconcile being able to choose for yourself with the physical evidence mentioned before.

You can stimulate neurons and get individuals (yes, even humans) to respond in a particular way. You can dictate the perception and the experience, and the consciousness (ultimately), by stimulating neurons in a particular way. That sounds deterministic, not-so 'free willy'.

What do you consider the single greatest achievement in your professional life/career?

Hopefully I haven't had it yet. It's got to be coming. I haven't felt it yet. Maybe the attainment of the Canada Research Chair. That was a milestone for me. Election to the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars was also very important to me.

Mentorship is a big deal to me, too. It's helping students along their path, helping them get to where they want to go.

What about in personal life?

Marriage to my wife Dagmar, and step-fathering three lovely girls and not having any of them hate me. That's a major achievement.

Any advice for young people interested in psychology?

Get involved in research early. Find some aspect of research that turns you on.

Thank you for your time, Dr. Bernstein.

Westside Seniors Hub

May 8, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

The Westside Seniors Hub (WSH) is a collective of member agencies, who work with seniors in the Westside of Vancouver. The WSH has been working for about two and a half years on the housing issues for seniors in the Westside. With respect to the housing issue for seniors, the partners of the WSH identified, about one year ago, noticed staff were increasingly encountering seniors. These seniors were requesting assistance with housing. For example, some have been evicted from housing. Why?

They had rental apartments. The rental apartments needed some renovations. Then the rents could be raised, but the seniors, who came forward, could not afford the rent for the single-family dwelling anymore. That is, the Westside of Vancouver seniors in the single-family dwellings, or single-family homes, were, in a real sense, asset rich and cash poor. As with the current real estate market, their assets increased significantly, but their cash, on hand, is low. As these houses in the Westside of Vancouver are old, they need adaptations.

The seniors could not afford the adaptations. The agencies began to see more distress associated with the housing problems in the area. This issue has been given insufficient attention as a seniors' issue. The WSH talked with the seniors' council and partners to help with the issues, to see areas of potential assistance for seniors in housing troubles. The Jewish family agency came to the WSH. They applied through Vancouver Coastal Health to hire a researcher. The research would interview the agencies and stakeholders more broadly to get the bigger picture of the situation.

This leads to two pictures in a bigger frame. One group are the home owners. The others are the renovators. "Some are being 'ren-evicted'. Their apartment will be upgraded. Their rent is raised. But, of course, the rent is raised to the point where they can't afford them anymore," Mary Jane McLennan, member of the WSH, said, "Seniors want to age in place, connected to the services they are established with: medical services and all of the things that communities offer, grocery shopping and all of the basics."

The risk is seniors are being evicted based on renovations and then rented at a higher cost. Seniors, in general, want to be in an established community. For many seniors, it takes time to become established in a community, which can create a problem if evicted and needing to find a new community. Senior communities are becoming, and will increasingly become, an issue because Vancouverites live so long now. In the interviews conducted by the researcher, other information emerged including the need to work collaboratively and for courageous leadership in addressing these issues.

Market subsidies could reflect real market prices and costs. The developments could cater to investors and seniors. The improved collaboration could support some of the organizations involved in the community. More in-depth information is in the report entitled "Seniors Housing on the Westside of Vancouver." The report itself is a snapshot of the current issues seniors are experiencing now.

If you want to find out more or become involved, please see the information below:

2305 West 7th Avenue,
Vancouver BC V6K 1Y4
Tel: 604-736-3588
westsideseniorshub.org
seniorshub@kitshouse.org

Learning Analytics Resesarch Group

An Interview with Prof. Kumar (Part One)

An Interview with Professor Vivekanandan S. Kumar on AU, Students, and Research

May 18, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Students at Athabasca University (AU) have a unique set of opportunities and benefits in terms of the online and at-a-distance education, especially in terms of resources for research. What distinguishes AU from other universities in terms of possible contributions to the larger human capital contributions of provinces and territories to the research and economic base of the country?

One of the research challenges we faced was about tackling the perception that instruction through online learning was subpar to the instruction at brick-and-mortar universities. Then, why top universities in the world are resorting to online instruction as supplemental to regular classroom instruction?

Is there an underlying assumption that ‘proper’ instruction yields optimal learning for students, which in turn implies students better suited to uplift Canada in its economic quest?

This is a core presumption in the current educational setup that Athabasca University has the power to investigate and reform.

It is not just proper ‘instruction’, but also proper ‘learning’ that yields human capital contributions that Canada needs.

Athabasca University offers its students to be better prepared in subject areas and most importantly, yet surreptitiously, engages them to build the capacity to self-learn, self-regulate, and self-persist. These are the kinds of students who are better prepared to shoulder the pursuit of knowledge-based economy of the country.

This ‘capacity building’ is the unacknowledged secret behind the use of online instruction as supplemental to traditional classroom-based instruction. Athabasca’s curricular design is geared towards this ‘capacity building’ in our students to self-propel to meet the challenges of the century.

In some circles, people refer to this as flipped-instruction. I would like to refer to it as flipped-cognition, where students drive the quest for learning, in subject matter excellence as well as in cognitive triangulation to become creative learners in broadening and deepening the economic base of Canada.

The opportunity to study should be completely open. Open to anyone irrespective of anything else. Students should feel the yearning for learning. Students should shoulder the burden of learning. Teachers and curricula should take the responsibility to guide students to excel, not force them towards excellence.

There is a fine-line between me thrusting myself to reach a clearer goal than me being pushed by someone to reach a vague goal. This fine-line defines the long-term success stories of our

students. This fine-line advances the kinds of research we offer our students. This fine-line opens up economic drivers for Canada.

Canada used to be the world leader in online instruction and online learning. The rest of the world has already caught up with us. In many cases, the rest of the world has overtaken us, forcing us to pursue. One of these cases is about catering to the masses of students from around the world who have the capacity to learn but not the opportunity.

There are many off-shore campuses from traditional university around the world. Why?

These are students who do not fit the regular educational stream. How about students who live in remote places? How will we offer the same opportunities that students in populated centers enjoy?

How could we make geographical distances disappear when it comes to learning? How to cater to such masses, high quality study material, instruction, guidance, and self-learning potential, in a scalable and sustaining fashion? Athabasca University has that know-how.

Athabasca University students go through that know-how and have the opportunity to investigate it further and make it the common currency of learning in the near future. I am from India, and I know for sure (sad laughter) a large percentage of students who graduate from high school simply do not have opportunity to study further.

This is common in many developing nations, because of a lack of infrastructure to offer traditional instruction. How about Athabasca University students spread the message about how they learned online and explore ways to bring such opportunities to these deprived students?

I believe in online learning. I believe it is the way of the future and will become main-stream. I think, we at Athabasca University, especially students, should strive further to commit ourselves to show that online learning is on par, at least on par, with traditional universities.

We should strive to research the fundamental changes and challenges online learners experience and make it a staple global platform of learning in the near future.

An Interview with Prof. Kumar (Part Two)

An Interview with Professor Vivekanandan S. Kumar on AU, Students, and Research

May 18, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

What pathways exist for students, undergraduate and graduate, to become involved in research at AU?

Oh! Research is not constrained by subject or by the person wanting to do research. It is confined by the interest students bring in to the area of exploration.

Take for example, undergraduate students, typically third and fourth year students, are engaged in various research projects in our Learning Analytics research group. They identify the problem. They discuss solutions. They pick a good solution. They implement it. They test it. They publish it. They then move on to the next big problem.

Kinshuk and I, as supervisors of this research group, are here to guide them, to provide some resources and to establish a network. Interestingly, this network is in a constant state of flux, researchers coming and going, researchers including undergraduate students, graduate students, post-doctoral students, Mitacs interns, visiting students from other countries, visiting Professors, industry partners and government agencies and liaisons.

Students are exposed to such a large network and discover their true passion in research.

The Learning Analytics research group has many student-driven research explorations.

The group believes in Lean and Agile way of learning and in Lean and Agile way of conducting research.

We meet daily and weekly and monthly to share our progress as well as pains. We celebrate our research advancement. The research group, if seen as a biological entity, has what it takes to sustain itself. This is the kind of research groups we should promote at AU, in all disciplines and across disciplines.

We are here to simply show them the way to say, “hey, this is what I know, what I studied in the past 35 years, and these are the interesting areas for you to explore”. And then, the students have to take ownership and say, “Oh yeah, that is something absolutely beautiful that I want to explore and contribute to, for humanity”.

That is the kind of passion from the inside that needs to be nurtured in research groups.

“Students should demand AU to facilitate the creation of such student-driven research groups.”

Students should create their own pathways and invite the rest of us to come and contribute. We need to identify such research drivers from among our students. *Thankfully*, we have plenty of such drivers. They know how to blaze research pathways on their own with minimal guidance.

This is a beautiful characteristic I see often in our students. As an undergraduate student, anyone that comes to AU should be aware of, if not prepared, to tackle these two critical traits – self-regulate and persist. AU is not just a learning university, but also a research university. If pathways don’t exist, then students should create them.

Students can do the initial background investigation. They can find the right group of people who can contribute to establish this pathway. They can consult Professors about funding opportunities. They can consult AU advancement and the Research Centre about government and industry partners who would be interested in such a pathway. They can design a research process, hopefully Lean and Agile, which can govern the progress and the measurement of this research pathway.

AU itself should find better ways to expose its ongoing research, research potential, and research facilities. We are limited by distance and geography but we can comfortably overcome them when it comes to exploring a research pathway. We do have that know-how. The point is, I would like to see students be the drivers in creating and nurturing research pathways and the rest of AU would be there to support such student initiatives.

We can think of this as flipped-research, research driven by students and supported by the rest of the AU community. Just the opposite of what one would expect in a traditional university. Students can do their research wherever they are in the world, as long as the resources can reach them when they need them.

How can AU help students find the right tools, reach the right mindset, and be with the right group to flourish in research?

In spite of being a CARI, given the size of AU, we are limited by our resources and by our reach. But, within these constraints, there are boundless research pathways. It is all there for our students to take ownership and drive research pathways. Start within your class and form a research interest group. Find seniors with similar interest. Find similar research groups in other institutions. Approach Professors. Do a quick literature review. Contact AU research service providers such as the Research Centre and Advancement. Seek internal and external funding sources. Apply for funding in collaboration with Professors. Get a research pathway started, irrespective of the funding. Or, get onboard a research pathway that already exists.

Universities advance many research beacons. Students can follow and come ashore using one of these beacons. Or, create their own beacon.

Lost in Samsara

Guest Blog-What Is Sustainability? By Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

What is sustainability? In biological ecosystems, it tends to mean the ability or capacity of that ecosystem to persist. It might ask, “How long has this ecosystem been around – and what’s its range of adaptability?” You can look at large-scale phenomena such as forests as one example. They’ve been around the block, and back, for a long time. In addition, it relates to nation and society building that is sustainable, which is known as sustainable development. This idea might ask, “How can we have a zero waste and renewable energy society?”

Finally, it can relate to the science of sustainability with respect to nation or society building, *and* the environment. It might ask, “How can we create a society sustainably integrated into the local environment?” Some of the main concerns for sustainability are green technologies, renewable energy, green building, sustainable agriculture and architecture, and the impacts of climate change on human societies and environment.

In particular, it relates to environmental degradation from overconsumption, and global warming or climate change. All of these ideas, and associated issues, are important, but I consider the most important one related to the changing climate and environmental degradation because these relate to human activity. That is, climate change global warming from human industrial activity *and* environmental degradation from human waste.

Sustainability might be considered a continuous movement or effort to meet the present needs of everyone. And while meeting everyone’s needs – children and the old, it’s not compromising or burdening the future generations by destruction of the environment or the climate. Some have delineated this as the intersection of economy, environment, and society.

Ethical and sustainable fashion companies like Kai Lite Apparel works within this domain. It works towards helping others contribute to a sustainable net capacity of the current generation with respect to the environment and not burdening future generations.

In a way, sustainable and ethical fashion relates to production lines, supply chains, and climate change or global warming. It emphasizes natural fibres for clothing, fabrics, and textiles that can be biodegraded. Also, it emphasizes individual consumers’ choices with respect to the environment. Ethical in this context means for the producer, the consumer, and the common ‘externalities’ such as the environment.

Within a larger framework, some might characterize this as a sustainability revolution. And a sustainability revolution that deals with community, commerce, ecology and its design, the biosphere, and the way these interconnect for a sustainable fashion industry.

If you look at large-scale sustainable fashion industries, you can see the international effects in terms of sales, harvesting natural fibres, production lines and supply chains with ‘living’ wages, workers’ rights, biodegradable clothing, slow fashion, upcycling, zero or negative waste, and a suite of policies and activities towards a sustainable future.

Center for Inquiry Canada

Support Secularism in British Columbia

November 18, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

The Centre for Inquiry has a new branch in Victoria, BC. The members there have started two on-line petitions, calling for an end to special treatment for religion in the provincial school system and healthcare system.

Petition for a secular school system: <https://www.change.org/p/honourable-rob-fleming-public-money-for-public-schools-in-bc>

Petition for secular healthcare: <https://www.change.org/p/honourable-adrian-dix-secular-health-care-in-bc>

Everyone is invited to sign the petitions to show their support, whether or not they are residents of British Columbia.

Petition: One Secular School System for All

November 18, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

The Government of British Colombia has worked to act according to the principle of “public money for public schools, private money for private schools” for the province. There is a petition in order to urge the British Colombia government to continue to enact this policy (Center for Inquiry Canada, 2017).

That is, the cessation of the provision of funding for independent schools in addition to an amendment to the Independent Schools Act (Government of British Columbia, 2017).

For separate and independent schools in a democratic society to exist, whether by class, socioeconomic status, or religion, these undermine the very principles upon which the province of British Columbia and the country of Canada stand with respect to democratic values.

This petition is a public call for the re-instantiation of the democratic values this country upholds. This recent policy undermines and harms the public school system. This petition is a call to change that.

to sign this petition, please visit <https://www.change.org/p/honourable-rob-fleming-public-money-for-public-schools-in-bc>

Petition: One Secular Healthcare System for All

November 18, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Internationally renowned healthcare, it is a privilege and right Canadian citizens take for granted in many instances. In the province of British Columbia, the government stands for a secular province.

The control of public health care facilities, and the funding for those facilities, are to be grounded in a secular foundation. Many public health care providers are religious at the root.

Based on beliefs systems coming from “holy scripture” and religious authorities, at times, the religious publicly funded health care providers will refuse provisions of reproductive, end of life, and some other medical services.

For example, in British Columbia, there are eight publicly funded hospitals administered by Roman Catholic Church bodies. About 1/3 of all hospitals in Ontario are administered by the Roman Catholic Church.

The morning after pill is not even available in Catholic hospitals as well as outright refusal for ectopic pregnancies in an emergency situation, which is typically an emergency. Registered nurses and medical doctors have to sign an agreement that they will follow the tenants of the faith or religion of the hospital, too.

This must stop.

A secular health care system for all will satisfy the need for safe and equitable access to healthcare services, where the secular can choose to access things such as the morning after pill and end-of-life services; and those that have religious tenets against them do not have to. This is the only fair basis for a secular healthcare system for all.

to sign this petition, please visit <https://www.change.org/p/honourable-adrian-dix-secular-health-care-in-bc>

iData Research Inc.

Market Research Intelligence on Orthopedic Trauma:

Business Development Representative - Orthopedics, Trauma at iData Research Inc.

November 27, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

To gain a competitive edge in the medical business, one needs to learn from the past to project into the future. Those forecasts need robust, comprehensive, and accurate data. iData Research Inc. stands at the juncture between your competitive advantage in the medical devices field and the data to make the right decisions.

iData Research Inc. works with Fortune 500 companies, consulting companies, and medical firms. In order for them to have the competitive advantage in the market place, whether large or small enterprises, they know having accurate and comprehensive data is key to their success. iData Research Inc. is the go-to company for them.

I am a business development representative in the sales sector of iData Research Inc. with an emphasis on orthopedic trauma medical devices in the global series market. I am here to help: How? I listen and look for mutual benefit. I want your enterprise to flourish. I think we've got the data for you. Our recent 2017 orthopedic trauma report for the US has been published.

When there is a constant influx of newer technologies into the marketplace of orthopedic trauma medical devices, the largest segment, the plate and screw market, is changing with the introduction of new materials such as titanium, locking/hybrid systems, and anatomical plates.

Higher cost items replace the legacy counterparts and the market remains limited by purchasing entities and third-party insurers reducing the cost. How? They ignore differences between different types of plates and screws.

The orthopedic trauma market is a maturing market, which is important because of the significant niches within this market as a whole. The recent acquisitions of core products by major orthopedic trauma companies will likely unlock growth over the next seven years. On behalf of iData Research Inc., I am here to help you to target this maturing orthopedic trauma market. Stay tuned for more posts on the new report!

You can find me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#), and at telephone: 604-266-6933 ext. 220 | fax: 604-266-6934. You can find iData Research Inc. on the [web](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#).

PardesSeleh.com

Ask Pardes 1 - Bernie Sanders and the Women's Convention

October 12, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Bernie Sanders is at a women's convention. Why are people mad at him?

Pardes Seleh: People are angry that the person who is speaking at a women's convention this year is an old white man who lost to a woman in the Democratic primaries last year.

They are saying it would be more appropriate for a woman to speak than a man. What is funny that is happening right now is progressives are the ones opposing his speaking, but conservatives are the ones rushing to his defense, that is being reported on CNN right now.

Jacobsen: What is your own view of Bernie Sanders and his politics?

Seleh: I think Bernie's idea of a utopia if carried out is very scary. He is a socialist. His idea of vacations in Soviet Russia. He believes in government programs for everything. Government programs and solutions for everything. He believes in redistribution, which is an economic position that I oppose.

I think he is an idealist. So, he doesn't get much support from the Democrats. I feel he is sincere about his ideas. As a person, I think he is a likable person, which is why he got a lot of the populist democratic vote last year.

Even though, he lost to Hillary last year.

Ask Pardes 2: The Wall and Immigration

October 16, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What do you think about the wall?

Pardes Seleh: I think there should be a wall in the way Israel has a wall, perhaps. A wall that does the job, which enforces the law or those boundaries. Otherwise, there is no reason for it being there.

Jacobsen: What about immigration?

Seleh: I think that once there is a wall and a way to enforce and regulate the amount of the flow of legal versus illegal immigrants across the border. There shouldn't be a problem of anchor babies because you wouldn't be having people using illegal methods.

People would have to use legal methods to get into the country. Ideally, a wall eliminates the problem of anchor babies. What about those who have overstayed and had babies?

Deporting illegal persons whose entire family is here, who has been here for years, is much tougher than doing that to someone who has overstayed their visa, it would have been done anyway.

Once there is the defined border, this solves a lot of those issues. I think there should be a transition period, where some are given priority and then granted visas because not to reward the disregard of the law but to compensate for our failure to enforce the law.

For a time, until the wall is established, to have some priority granting visas for people who have been here for a time and anyone who comes after has to follow the newly established rules, those will be stricter but not as harsh.

Ask Pardes 3: Climate Change

October 16, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Do you believe in climate change?

Pardes Seleh: Yes, I mean obviously I believe the climate is changing. Do I believe it is predominantly changing because of man? I don't know. I find it very idealistic to think that man controls everything.

I don't think you can say that. Contributing, okay yeah, but enough that it is a role that can be reversed? Not, in my view.

Ask Pardes 4: Cardi B, Spirit Animal

October 17, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Who is Cardi B? Why is she your new spirit animal?

Pardes Seleh: She raps. I think she is Dominican. Her style is very street artisty. It is confident. I think she embodies what a lot of people are craving. That is this unapologetic confidence, regardless of gender.

It looks like she doesn't care about social justice. She is herself. She's not speaking for anybody else, but I think the reason she is so popular is that she represents this growing wave of people want to distance themselves from identity politics and victim narratives.

It is this universal sense of confidence that can be applied to anybody. She did this video about what to do "if your man cheats," in which she said she'd pull a prank on her guy and get him to sleep with a "tranny" while he's drunk. It's pretty funny.

The messages in her songs and tweets are from a position of power and not weakness.

The quality of her music itself kind of sucks and she uses crass language. She is also typically not the best dressed, in my opinion, in terms of fashion. But her personality - the main driving factor behind what made her music great and what got her so many fans in such a short amount of time- is why i like her so much.

Ask Pardes 5: Cannabis/Marijuana Legalization

October 25, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You had some thoughts on marijuana/cannabis legalization. What are your thoughts marijuana/cannabis legalization?

Pardes Seleh: I think it's only a matter of time before it becomes legal in America the way alcohol is. It is only a social stigma that makes it so marijuana isn't legal where alcohol is legal and, in fact, more damaging and a worse potential addiction than cannabis is.

The only reason cannabis is stigmatized more is that there has been less research done on cannabis. People know less about it. If it were fully legalized, more research could be done. More could be known about it. Just as the symptoms are not as crazy as the symptoms of alcoholism, I am confident that it will be as the research coming out will confirm that it is not as harmful as alcohol.

With legalization, it will not be a fringe substance used by people on the street like crack addicts. It can be used as a natural alternative to harmful chemicals. There are benefits.

The substance itself will not be the thing to improve society, but legalizing it can help. Bringing it out of the black market will be great for capitalism. It is, right now, something often only drug lords have access too. It is associated with crime and manipulating trade with other human beings.

In places where it is legal, only a handful of growers are licensed to sell. It makes it so that they have a monopoly over other people. It is damaging to the industry. There is a cap for which it can help boost the economy.

I think when you legalize it, a few things will happen:

It will be taken out of the black market.

It can be used as an alternative to harmful substances. One with fewer catastrophic effects.

It can help boost the economy.

As an aside, not as a reason for legalization, but as an aside, it can shift the culture and the way things are seen. Instead of going to bars and drinking alcohol, people will smoke weed. It sounds outlandish. It sounds crazy. Think about it, we only think about street thugs smoking weed. But it is not a violence-inducing substance like alcohol is. What better way to reduce bar fights and nightlife, especially in DC? Every other night someone is getting hurt, going to the hospital. What, instead of a bar fight and drinking people, is better than just smoking weed?

Obviously, everything in excess is bad. But when you allow all of the options to be there, the better ones can shift to the front.

Ask Pardes 6: Donald Trump, Racism, and Bigotry

October 27, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What do you think about claims being racist and bigoted?

Pardes Seleh: So, I don't there is such a thing as racism and bigotry the way we know it. I think there is such a thing as being an asshole. I don't think it is limited to race. People afraid of other people because of their race. It is simply stereotyping.

Often, it is an ignorant assumption, but I don't think that's more malicious than that. A regular guy who seems very weak can be preyed on because he seems weak. But he might be strong enough to fight back.

A stereotype is an assumption. People may prey on this guy because he seems weak, even though he is really not. It is really the same thing. By running away from a guy passing by you in the market because he's black, you're assuming that since he looks a certain way then he will act a certain way.

We do this in every aspect of our lives. It's dumb. It is not a malicious thing. Racism and bigotry are made-up concepts. It is not real. It is not, "I hate people because of their race." It is a way we judge things based on our limited judgement.

It is bad judgment. By calling it racism or bigoted, you are politicizing basic human nature. I think it is wrong because it is so selective. It makes things worse. No one's judgment is perfect; we are not walking psychologists or brainiacs. Sometimes, stereotyping is necessary.

Having an ideology behind it, like David Duke or Richard Spencer, that is a totally different thing, saying, "I want a systematic government form of regulation." That is not racism. That is fascism.

Jacobsen: How does this tie into President Donald Trump?

Seleh: Charges for Donald Trump being "racist" or "bigoted"... he does not espouse any of those ideological views regarding white nationalism and so on. He is simply being honest. He thinks the things everybody else thinks. We do think them.

You have to wonder when a Muslim guy is walking through a security checkpoint and in the height of a radical Islamic crisis because your life is at stake. Other people's lives are at stake. You can't ignore them, and nobody does.

Some will be honest about it. Some won't. I am profiled each day because of how I look. Some older people say stuff like, "Oh! I thought you were a terrorist." I have never been told that by someone I didn't like. The ones who told me tended to be honest older people, hicktowners.

It is often endearing. I am not insulted. I simply fit a profile. It is just how the world is. Just like anything else, you could be walking around with a backpack that could have a bomb and if someone said, that you were holding a bomb, you would not be insulted because you are innocent. You'd say, "Here, it's not a bomb, want to check it?"

Ask Pardes 7a: What best makes a good man to you?

November 3, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What best makes a good man to you?

Pardes Seleh: A good man is someone who neither oppresses his woman for being a woman with domestic duties, nor treats as if she is a victim that needs special treatment. A good man is simply a good person.

He is one who has good intentions and good morals, regardless of whether he is interacting with a woman or a man. He treats his female partner the way that he'd want to be treated.

The good man doesn't have to be a feminist. Feminism is a facade. I think feminist men often like to think women are victims so that they can be saviors. It is understandable. It is a natural thing for a man to want.

But it can be dangerous because painting all women as victims is not helpful for women or for men. As a man, you're always going to be demonized no matter what you do. Under third-wave feminist rules, you are likely to be written off and demonized for things that are not even malicious, just because you're a man.

For women, this mentality is not good or helpful. It is not helpful to put someone always in the position of receiving and not giving in a relationship. You're basically ensuring that the receiver will always remain weak.

This mentality relies on women always being victims. That is not helpful. It is very damaging. Men don't always think about it that way, because it feels good to be called a feminist. A good man will be good regardless of what he calls himself.

Ask Pardes 7b: Good Man in Orthodox Judaism

October 29, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What makes a good man in Hasidic Ultra-Orthodox Judaism?

Pardes Seleh: According to Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, the purpose of a man is to study the *Torah* as much as possible in the living hours that aren't sleeping, eating, and fulfilling basic survival needs.

It is not the toiling in *Torah* study. It is not that that's a means to apply it to your life or becoming more of a *Torah*-inspired person, but that is the goal. The toiling itself is the goal. That is what makes you a better, stronger, virtuous person.

Someone that earns the highest regard in the world to come. A good man in Orthodox Judaism is someone who toils in the *Torah*.

It is expected that it will come with the application and the good deeds. Somebody in the scripture will be knowledgeable of things.

But the purpose of a woman is to help her husband in the *Torah*. She will help him raise the kids and will have a job, usually, that's the case. It becomes their full-time thing. The wife will often get a job and work.

If she can't work, for whatever reason, they usually get support from other people. It's the family member or the community, where the man toils in the *Torah*. There is a central bank that distributes money.

It was a system to help with the arrangement of the man toiling in scripture all day and his woman helping him. His duties to his marriage and wife are to treat her kindly and respect the marriage.

Basically, it is to treat her well and study *Torah*. It is pretty simplistic and similar to how every other culture of how a man should treat a woman, but his primary goal in this Earth is toiling in the *Torah*.

The things he does in practice are to protect his *Torah* study. He won't watch pornography. He won't look at naked women. He won't look at things in the street, signs in the street, billboards, won't listen to secular music.

All to keep himself holy in order to study *Torah*.

Ask Pardes 7c: Good Man in Secular Culture

October 29, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What makes a good man in secular culture?

Pardes Seleh: A good man in secular culture, or the one we're used to right now - which is liberalism, a good man is a feminist. he will understand and recognize that females are victims of a patriarchal system that oppresses daily and has been oppressing them for years, and will never stop oppressing them.

A good man will, in his heart, understand that he is the oppressor and will be conscious of his role as a feminist, according to this ideology. He will give special attention to that matter in that way that he treats women.

Ask Pardes 8: Era of Multiparty Coalitions

December 2, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Why are we in the era of multiparty coalitions in the US?

Pardes Seleh: We are in the era of multiparty coalitions because our two party system is a label and nothing more than that.

There is nothing holding the Democratic Party together more than their love of government. There is nothing holding the Republican party together more than the distrust of government. I think those values are important, but they are not everything. Which is why on so many issues, there are so many crossovers, where the Republican and Democratic parties will agree with one another - factions of them.

There are so many things going on. Basically, everything is just a label. They don't reflect actual ideologies. Conservatives, for example—there are so many things that can make someone a small government conservative.

Now, you are a Right-wing nationalist who likes government putting in regulations for certain things that are nationalist or protectionist or whatever. You can be labeled a conservative if you despise Planned Parenthood, which is a small government conservative thing and a social conservative thing.

You can call yourself completely liberal, but you just don't like socialism. There's basically a bunch of things that can make you conservative. It is all labels and relative to how you think. Everyone to the right is conservative and everyone to the left of you is liberal, but none of those words have any intrinsic meaning.

Ask Pardes 9: Era of Multiparty Coalitions

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Ask Pardes 10: Trump-Trudeau

October 29, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How does the dichotomy between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau look to you?

Pardes Seleh: I don't know a lot about Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The interesting thing about President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is that they agree on a lot of things. The only difference is the personalities are different. Donald Trump is more flamboyant and says all of these offensive things.

Trudeau is more palatable to a lot of crowds. He seems more concerned with his image, though he may agree with Donald Trump on a lot of things. One thing was immigration. Trudeau for open borders and criticized Trump for the open borders, but eventually when you're having issues with refugees.

He put out the tweet about enforcing laws and not having people in illegally. Ultimately, he agrees with Trump, but Trump is demonized. The way he says it. I am totally generalizing on this one example.

That is the general sense I get from the way they are the things they agree with. On the flip side, Donald Trump supports gay marriage the way Justin Trudeau supports gay marriage, but somehow Donald Trump is this homophobe because of his tone, his personality.

Not because he fundamentally disagrees with Justin Trudeau on the topic of marriage.

Lift Cannabis News

Mixing Substances - Alcohol and Cannabis

February 11, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

“The virtue of justice consists in moderation, as regulated by wisdom,” Aristotle said, which seems true to me. The notion of excess, even in the use commonly accepted substances, seems foolhardy, especially when decided and acted on oneself and others. Sometimes, individual recreational substances can be beneficial, but in combination can be harmful. Or the individual recreational, even therapeutic in many cases, substances can be benign with no serious impacts to health whatsoever, leaving the utility in its recreational or therapeutic use something to celebrate in Canada. Take coffee, for example, it is beneficial in moderate amounts for the user, which provides a series of health benefits, but too much and then harm sets based on specific genetic precursors for the inability to break down caffeine. What about sets of substances, common ones?

One common set is alcohol and cannabis. Alcohol, in moderation, appears to improve health outcomes. According to the Mayo Clinic, moderate alcohol use in healthy adults means 1 drink for women in all age cohorts and up to 2 drinks for men age 65 and older, e.g. 12 fluid ounces of beer or 5 fluid ounces of wine. In fact, it’s potential benefits can be reduction in the risk of the development of heart disease (and “dying from heart disease”), a reduction in the risk of ischemic stroke or the narrowing or blocking of arteries to the brain, and the reduction in the chances for diabetes. Not bad.

Cannabis is not harmful in moderate amounts in the adult population. It has been shown to, even to those that do not use it, produce feelings of “relaxation or well-being.” It even has the potential to treat “chronic skin disorders, cancer-related weakness and weight loss, chronic pain, Huntington's disease, sleep disorders, eye disease, multiple sclerosis, and schizophrenia.” Also, pretty good. What about the mix?

The Mayo Clinic notes that alcohol should be used with caution, especially with the driving of automobiles. Cannabis can increase the probability of collision, the “risk of collision,” in combination with alcohol. Where the effects are on alertness and driving performance, the associated impact with driving can be inferred. Drivers need to be alert to avoid collisions. So, what’s the take-home message?

The moderate and judicious use of cannabis and alcohol individually can enhance specific health outcomes from heart disease and ischemic stroke for alcohol to general well-being, sleep disorders, and chronic skin disorders for cannabis. Recalling, of course, the main source of the information provided is from one of the leading medical centers in the world, the Mayo Clinic. If you’re going to use cannabis, alcohol, or coffee for that matter, solely, then the moderate use can be a benefit. But if you’re going to mix cannabis and alcohol, then the main concern will be mental acuity, especially as it pertains to driving motorized vehicles, which is an important thing to bear in mind when mixing cannabis and alcohol.

Drug Policy News in Brief

December 2, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Drug users do not deserve death

Philippine Star reports that the war against drugs by the Philippine government “does not justify the reimposition of the death penalty” because there are less lethal means that can be used to combat the negative effects of drugs on society.

NoBox, a drug policy reform advocacy group, said, “Drug use alone should not be seen as a social evil or moral failing, as a huge majority of people involved with drugs do not have any associated drug use problems.”

President Rodrigo Duterte previously stated that the death penalty is a necessity because it would prevent the “drug menace from reaching the current alarming levels.” NoBox noted that some use drugs as coping mechanisms and do not harm society.

AMA considering value-based pricing

According to the American Medical Association, or AMA, (Blog), value-based pricing is being considered by American physicians, which “has the potential to reduce prescription drug spending in the U.S.”

The House of Delegate for the AMA, in some light of the increases in drug prices that affect patients, wants to address the price hikes through “new guiding principles to support value-based prescription drug pricing.”

AMA President, Andrew W. Gurman, M.D., said, “The new AMA policy acknowledges the carte blanche approach to drug... This transformation should support drug prices based on their clinical outcomes, and reductions in morbidity and mortality. We need to have the full picture to assess a drug’s true value to patients and the health care system.”

Drug Experts “implore DEA to keep opiate-like plant legal”

As well, the Washington Post reported on kratom, which “is a safer alternative to the powerful opiates that have fueled a nationwide addiction crisis.” Advocates for kratom and the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) are in a “fierce battle.”

Over 22,000 comments came into the federal proposition for a temporary ban on the natural drug. It has been known in Southeast Asia “as a stimulant and pain reliever,” for centuries in fact, but less known in the United States.

Many comments remarked on the positive benefits to personal life and functionality for users. However, the DEA considered kratom “an imminent hazard to the public safety.” That is, opinions differ on kratom’s status as a help or a hazard.

Drug Policy News in Brief

December 4, 2016

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Ireland opposition bill allowing cannabis for medical use passed

According to the Irish Examiner, in Ireland, a bill, which had “widespread support,” was passed on Thursday without a vote via the Dáil, or the lower house of the Irish legislature. A large number of Irish citizens gave “hopeful testimony.”

There were descriptions about the relief from chronic pain from cannabis in addition to the scientific evidence to bolster the claims, which have been around “for some time.” Apparently, one mother’s testimony stood above the others.

She walked from Cork to Dublin in support of the legalization. With cannabis-derived cannabidiol (CBD), the woman, Vera Twomey, said her daughter, Ava, aged 6 “might be dead” without the CBD provided to her. Ava suffered from seizures. A Barnes report from the UK “reviewed all the all the evidence and found a substantial body of clinical evidence to prove medical cannabis works.”

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An Common Ill-Advised Mix – Alcohol and Cannabis

February 10, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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Karmik

An Interview with Cameron Schwartz, Administrative Coordinator of Karmik

July 30, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Note: This interview has been edited for clarity, readability, and concision.

How did you become involved in Karmik?

It was a couple years ago. A friend was asked to lead one of the workshops from the volunteer training. I heard about Karmik through them, and decided to attend. I was eager to become involved with it.

You are the administrative coordinator of Karmik. What tasks and responsibilities come with the position?

I do a lot of the back-end work. I organize and manage behind the scenes.

What is the vision of Karmik?

As a harm reduction organization, we say, “We meet people where they are at.” We acknowledge their rights to make their own decisions, and that they will do what they think is best for them. We are there to support them to make the decisions in the safest way.

What are targeted objectives of Karmik?

We try to help people through difficult situations, especially when doing live events. We do peer counselling work. We talk to people. We help them sort out issues. Sometimes, at music festivals or events, their friends might not be there or they might need other sources of support.

We also distribute supplies to reduce transmission of STIs. We hand out party packs with condoms, lube, and straws. Overall, we aim to educate the public as well as advocate for sensible government policies surrounding harm reduction.

With the peer counselling work, what are some of the topics people want to discuss?

It depends on the event. If a music festival is not held in a city, there are fewer supports for mental health, e.g. professional mental health support. People might not have anyone to turn to, and many will not leave the festival to seek mental health support or for addictions.

On an informal, peer to peer basis, we help people talk through these issues. Sometimes, altered states play into this as well. It is not super emotionally involved all of the time, though. For example, they might need a ride home, and we might suggest calling friends or a cab.

There are stigmas in substance use and in mental illness. For those finding the privacy and comfort to discuss these things within the safe context, what tactics can be used to help those having a bad trip or might be predisposed to have bad ones?

If it is the result of a substance, it depends on the substance and its effects. Sometimes it comes down to just having a peer.

Many people will not feel comfortable approaching the RCMP or a security guard to talk about these issues for a variety of reasons. For tactics, I am surprised by the effect from being there, hanging out with them.

These peer counselling skills can be taught, but much of it comes from skills everyone has. Of course, other support systems are required in some cases, and we do our best to work with them and refer people when appropriate.

Karmik is a harm reduction organization. It tends to involve treatment, prevention, harm reduction, and enforcement. Some organizations will use all of those. Others will use some of those. What ones does Karmik use in assistance for youth activities?

In the context of the Four Pillars drug strategy, we are a harm reduction organization. It is important to recognize that is not the solution to everyone's problems. However, it is the solution to some issues.

We will refer people to local services and other organizations to help them when necessary, but we operate from a harm reduction standpoint.

What are some of Karmik's main activities for BC youth?

We do outreach work including going to parties, raves, and music festivals. Beyond that, we work on policy. We are involved in various community meetings, for example the DOAP, Drug Overdose Alert Partnership.

We have the fentanyl crisis. Typically, it is associated with heroin now. Many have recommended naloxone kits to prevent death by overdose. How are things for youth regarding the crisis? Other substances of potential harm too.

The reality is that it is not one group or locality. The fentanyl epidemic has been affecting recreational users of many substances from all demographics, including youth.

It is an incredibly complex issue. One thing we advocate for is freely available access to drug testing. In terms of substances laced with adulterants, this would require lab quality testing to assess dosages in micrograms, which, in the case of fentanyl, can be active and fatal.

What are the short-term initiatives for Karmik? Those that are not online at the moment.

We are advocating for easier access to fentanyl testing strips. It is a band aid to a larger problem, though. It is something immediate and available, and we want to increase accessibility for those services.

While it is not necessarily something new, we try to train community members to distribute naloxone. We have been doing this in partnership with Vancouver Coastal Health. We will try to have more autonomy with our own trainings to be the team to provide naloxone training to our community.

How would you like the organization to grow? What impacts would you like to see?

One long-term project is the development of informational resources. I want to see Karmik continue to approach substance use and other harm reduction related issues based on evidence and research.

I want to see Karmik's or other organizations' services provided at more local events in addition to bigger events and productions. That would go a long way.

An Interview with Munroe Ro, Founder and Outreach Director of Karmik

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Note: This interview has been edited for clarity, readability, and concision.

What was the inspiration for Karmik?

I love when people ask us this; inspiration comes from many places. Karmik was started through collaborative ideas and recognition of an identified need in the community. It did not come from just one person.

I grew up in places like Toronto, Prairies, and Central America; I am not from Vancouver originally. In Toronto, we had a similar harm reduction organization called the TRIP! Project. It is run and funded through the public health system. For me, one of the first raves I went to was where the TRIP! Project in Toronto was present. They seemed to be very supportive and at the same time, realistic - they didn't seem to pressure people and were just so warm and inviting, their vibes. I thought, "Wow! What is this?"

They have similar supports to Karmik at youth events through Toronto and some of the festivals around Ontario. Many harm reduction organizations working in nightlife and community settings will have similar setups. Karmik keeps in line with things that work, and we all share similar structures that have success in supporting our target demographic. Also, since we have the same structures, it allows us to create projects and collect data municipally and federally.

I was impacted by my experience with TRIP! Project. After that point, I wanted to make sure something existed. I grew up in the arts and music scene. I want to see the supports there. I have been around a bit. When I came to Vancouver, I moved here for professional life. I work in addictions, mental health, and social work as well. It is my day career.

When I moved out here, I was integrating into the communities more. I did not see many other projects like TRIP! Project. I started to ask questions. I started to figure out if that existed in Vancouver. A program to fill the identified gaps of public health in certain communities.

When I found none, I started to think about where I could place some skills there. From that point, I was active in online forums. I met Alex Betsos, who is the volunteer coordinator. He is another co-founder of Karmik.

Also, I met Margaret Yu there too. She is another co-founder. She stepped back in her duties (recently). We recognized the same gap in public health. We have a similar background in electronic music and festivals.

We did not see active support for people in harm reduction. The inspiration came from that. There were few historically active harm reduction groups; Mind Body Love and a Vancouver DanceSafe chapter were two of the identified previous supports. in Vancouver, BC.

What tasks and responsibilities come with Karmik?

I own the business and am one of three co founders. I am also the outreach director and on staff Naloxone trainer. I am definitely the annoying person bugging somebody about an event, having

harm reduction at their space or festival, and pressing them to talk about it and explore the new concept with me.

Also, I do back-end work with Karmik; this is variable from engagement to advocacy to engagement and research projects. Everyone in the organization will meet once a week together to then focus further on different tasks.

I facilitate naloxone training bi weekly for people under 30 years of age. I do naloxone trainings with different community groups, bar and event staff, citizens in general. I also facilitate Karmik volunteers in their Naloxone training for every cohort; Naloxone is an essential aspect of training for prospective volunteers.

I do live event support as well; during this role, we are called coordinators. When on site for an event, I am one of these coordinators. Coordinators are also different people (than our back end staff) employed to Karmik to be the team leads. They manage, support, and interact with the event staff, patrons, as well as managing the peers on shift during these events.

With the scope of Karmik, you mentioned harm reduction for the organization. What is harm reduction? Why is it the preferred strategy for Karmik?

Harm reduction can be applicable and accessible for many different people. It depends on our perception. Harm reduction is any practice that reduces harm for an individual. No matter the category or stipulation that falls into.

It is a practice with yourself. It will reduce harms of any associated behaviours for you. We can think of how harm reduction is basic. When you cross the road, will you look left and right? That is harm reduction.

You are making a safer choice and decision based on education and information. It is about making informed decisions. You looked left and right to cross the road. How did you know to look left and right? How does that factor into your choice?

A big part is increasing honest education for people, which is a key component of harm reduction. It will empower individuals to make better choices for themselves in any situation, which is inherently leading to harm reduction behaviours in all situations. If we dig deeper into this, why is that a good choice? Think a moment.

My scholastic achievements include a Bachelor of Health Sciences with a Major in Addictions as well as a Substance Use Counsellor diploma. Usually, I work as an addiction counsellor for youth with concurrent disorders, heavy opiate use and mental health. When we look at how people make decisions and care about their lives, it is about being empowered by the choices made by them.

We have an emphasis on their choices. Everyone can think back on times when people said, “You need to do this.” We reply, “Why do we need to do that?” Then somebody doesn’t give a great answer connected to our reality. It does not feel great for us to do something which is not true or genuine. We do not feel connected to our reality when we make choices for other people.

We do not feel that we are engaging in our reality to create our own lives to lead. When we are actively engaged in our lives with genuine connection and passion, we will make better decisions for ourselves. We want to continue that in life and have a personal measure of success.

Firstly, harm reduction is a great way of increasing accessibility to honest education. We want to give people the right education and tools to make the right choices.

Secondly, it increases people's empowerment and engagement with their own lives. It increases people's want and desire to control their own lives. It creates a healthier life. It increases the confidence and ambition to take control and create our own lives.

Individuals take control in a way considered the route of least resistance, typically. It's a concept of self-autonomy. We do not resist decisions or actions that we want to inherently want to do ourselves, that are genuine and connected to our true sense of self. When those choices are made in a healthier way, harm reduction is a relative concept.

We have to look at oppression, traumatized societies, peoples, and communities. The choices forced on us historically as well as currently, are not necessarily the choices we want to make. Harm reduction has to do with supporting people from oppressed, traumatized communities; individuals and communities that have been subjected to stigmatization or stereotyping.

Everyone has been a victim to some aspect in their lives; we can all be empathetic and compassionate when we take a look deeper inside ourselves, to those experiences or times. In regards to positive progression in public health we want to see; increased accessibility to honest education about substances and substance use, as well as increasing engagement strategies with peer to peer resources.

This is primarily so people can feel heard and share the education learned with their communities. This inevitably leads to people making the right choices for themselves and their communities.

It is a no-brainer. Harm reduction works because it works. I appreciate the humor... I used to roll my eyes when I heard that slang. Just kidding; I never did because I always cared about harm reduction. Harm reduction can be as simple a concept, as we allow it.

It is a strategy of, by, and for the people. It has the people's best interests at heart. In BC, the funds allocated for treatment and harm reduction are put towards incarceration and halfway strategies. Without addressing the root causes of any challenges, how can we hope to find or create pragmatic solutions?

Media attention has focused on looking at treatment programs and substance use support. Specifically, it looks at the reasons for them working and not working. Typically, the ones that do not work come from an oppressive mentality. Additionally, media has focused around the traditional, conservative question of philosophy concerning substance use: just say no? Personally, I spend the majority of my interviews combating Nancy Reagan and her archaic attacks on our personal autonomy.

Harm reduction is another means to increase openness for people that want to connect and for people that want to engage with self care practices. Harm reduction asks that you engage with your experience as who you are; to be present, raw and honest with yourself about what your needs are, and how significant a space they hold in your life. Harm reduction and self care are consistent commitments to yourself and your lifestyle, to stay safer in all aspects.

Looking into the present and into the future, what is the current scale of Karmik in terms of helping out youth activities and youth involved in them? And what are the plans for expanding operations?

I always want to expand and am always looking to expand further globally. We are passionate about how we want to move forward and this influences our ability to move forward quickly. It is a fantastic pace currently, for better or worse. Why? Because in this moment: we could choose to accept the newfound accessibility to modern harm reduction policies through our current health crisis with fentanyl. Although it might feel grim, we [harm reduction groups] can use the available supports in this situation, to push for justice and progressive drug policies. We have a higher likelihood of being heard, given our current health epidemic. I am sure other people have noticed this also; harm reduction is becoming a media hot topic and is very present in our public health discourse.

People are having a voice; people are being heard. We have a lot on the horizon. Karmik facilitates harm reduction through live support at music festivals, events and community spaces globally. We train peer-to-peer support groups to travel to all of our live events/festivals to support any type of “sanctuary” or “chill” space. The sanctuary is designed to provide a safe space for festival attendees to calm down and seek support in all kinds of challenging situations. Staffed by Karmik coordinators and trained (peer support) volunteers, we strive to provide meaningful connections for those struggling with adverse effects of drugs and alcohol, as well as those who cannot find their friends, or those who simply need someone sober to talk to. In order to create an inviting space, we set up themed decorations and therapeutic activities such as Lego and art stations. The sanctuary also helps to deal with strain on the capacity of the medical team. Sanctuary staff monitor individuals who do not require professional medical treatment and the medical team is able to act more efficiently in cases where their attention is desperately needed. Additionally, when attendees no longer need medical attention they are moved to our sanctuary space by the medical staff, allowing medics to continue addressing more serious concerns effectively.

Often we might travel for more than one to attend events; our routine is to be on tour through the North American festival season (late spring/summer); we staff local, municipal, and exterior events in BC. Additionally, we support harm reduction at international festivals (such as Bamboo Bass Festival annually in Jaco, Costa Rica). Recently, we were hired for a municipal event in Kamloops, BC through our festival connections with Electric Love Music Festival (held in Agassiz, BC). Karmik is not in Vancouver alone, although this is our home base. We run training programs for our volunteers year round, in order to provide opportunities for different levels of engagement for our volunteers/peer support workers with Karmik. At present, our training sessions are run x3 per year; spring, summer and winter session; x2 weekly for 3 hours, local to Vancouver, BC. They are extensive and year-round opportunities for new volunteers and supporters to connect with our larger network. All prospective, live event peer support workers go through our rigorous training program. Prospective volunteers must complete the full training program before being able to volunteer as peer support workers with Karmik for live events/festivals. That being said, Karmik volunteers come from all backgrounds and walks of life. Our volunteer roster includes interested parties from: public health, academia, government officials, non profit partners, djs, musicians, models, artists, media/film contacts, authors, frontline social workers), family, friends, loved ones and more; those who have been affected by the war on drugs find compassion and empathy in our spaces.

These training workshops are done partially by Karmik coordinators including: Alex Betsos (Drugs 101), Cameron Schwartz (Live Event Support) and myself (Peer Counselling 101 & Naloxone training), and rotating Karmik staff/practicum students for our Self Care workshop.

Some of Karnik's peer support training workshops are facilitated by other members of our harm reduction community who are local Vancouver, BC and engage with our demographic. Karnik seeks to engage and empower our collective community strength, aware that we are not (and should not), be the only source of positive influence, empathy and knowledge. Karnik is aware of the possible intersections across different disciplines in these communities of knowledge and support. For example, we have a local organization called The Consent Crew, which runs a one-evening workshop on consent; Kaschelle Thiessen with Vancouver Pride Society, who facilitates our anti oppression workshop; Mitchell Cummings who is a paramedic in Vancouver, BC, who facilitates our Live Events workshop; John Woods who facilitates our Sexual Harm Reduction 101 from OPT Sexual Health; and many more!

We attend drug policy conferences, both internationally and nationally. For example, I was at the Reform Conference in Washington 2016 in Washington, DC with Alex Betsos; we are often funded through scholarships and our working groups who have an academic interest in Karnik succeeding globally as an advocate for harm reduction. For conferences, we attend as Karnik, our independent harm reduction organization. At other times, we attend as part of other harm reduction communities on panels for collaborative pieces. There is the International Harm Reduction Conference happening in May 2017 in Montreal where both Betsos (as part of Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy) and myself (Karnik) have been accepted to present posters/harm reduction material. Additionally, we may attend the Reform 2017 and Club Health conference in Dublin, Ireland. My participation at the IHRC focuses on the accessibility to knowledge and support created through harm reduction and nightlife networks globally. Our participants are: Lori from TRIP (Toronto, CAD), Julie Soleil from GRIP (Montreal, CAD) and Chloe from Ankors (Kootenays, CAD). These global harm reduction networks are significant and essential to the academia and our active front line support. These allow us to create projects, facilitate shared research data collection goals, attend conferences and place positive pressure on legislative bodies for shared harm reduction goals.

Karnik works with different bodies of harm reduction organizations, nationally and internationally. We are part of lots of different projects at different levels. Some of our projects and ongoing working groups/meetings include: drug checking/testing; drug policies globally; municipal, federal and provincial task force groups focused on fentanyl and opiate ODs, mental health, addiction. A significant piece of our international networking projects includes, but is not limited, to: nightlife and networking in the Americas, which international supports for harm reduction with aligned harm reduction goals: The Loops (UK), ACEID (Costa Rica), ESPOLEA (Mexico), Regeneration (EUR), DanceSafe (USA), Stay Safe Seattle (USA), Safer Raving (USA), Amend the Rave Act! (USA), MAPS (INTL), Drug Policy Alliance (USA), Open Society Foundations (USA), CSSDP (INT'L), Healthy Nightlife (USA), Canadian Drug Policy Coalition (CAD), AIDS Committee of Ottawa (CAD), TRIP! Project (CAD), GRIP (CAD), Canadian Centre on Substance Use (CAD), and more.

We are in all possible and present spaces. In our off festival time, we are participating in all of these groups to move harm reduction projects forward on a greater scale and with more influence. For conferences, we attend as Karnik. Other times, we attend as part of other harm reduction communities on panels.

We work in different ways with others for social awareness and acceptance around harm reduction year round. I am working to expand Karnik into different chapters and communities in BC.

In Vancouver, we have public health primarily provided through Vancouver Coastal Health. Throughout BC, we can see the following public health authorities: Fraser Health, Providence Health, Interior Health, etc. Karmik is well-connected with all of these health authorities. Why? Because we are all working together to support each other. We have a great working relationship with everyone involved that is non judgemental, empathetic, compassionate, raw, genuine, loyal and progressive. Also as of 2016, we are listed on the Healthlink BC website; another example of how we work together to support communities.

For example, if I get an event request for Kamloops, I would love to say, “Hey Karmik chapter in Kamloops, let’s do this!” and provide accessible opportunities for people wanting to volunteer at events who aren’t based in Vancouver, BC. Also, the health authority in Kamloops is different, and we [as] Karmik want to engage with like minded communities, whether that is our Karmik volunteer pool or professional public health collaborations. We also want to see harm reduction supports increasingly accessible in remote communities of BC; we have fielded requests from community members to start Karmik chapters in their communities because they perceive Karmik as a strong conduit to affect their municipal networks and eventual policies.

Karmik does not have to, nor does it need to, support all of the harm reduction requests throughout BC. I would love to see others be able to step up and use our collective powers to create some real changes in our society, starting with communal success as opposed to individual success based on monetary values. Karmik’s intention of expansion is to create the same power of accessibility for all communities. That is some of our work for the future.

We recently hired some new people for our larger Karmik organization; we have different levels of engagement with Karmik, from paid positions to extended volunteer engagement. Recently, we have hired two new live event coordinators; they are responsible for managing onshift at events for Karmik presence, as well as responsible for our coordinator and managing our peer support volunteers on shifts at events/festivals. Also, for someone as part of the full organization, we hired one individual; we call these positions back end Karmik. We are always looking to expand and bring on inspired, passionate and revolutionary individuals as part of Karmik! Watch our Facebook group for job postings and volunteer training announcements! There is so much interest in what we’re doing and we are so happy to involve others who similarly, feel compelled by harm reduction philosophies.

However, we want to give due diligence by admitting that we need more people on board with Karmik. That is why we do our hiring. It is based out of needs and the understanding that we’re growing rapidly and that we want people want to grow with us.

In the future, we are always trying to run national and international drug testing projects. We are always on the tip of what is coming up, how to come together for Canada particularly, and so on.

I manage harm reduction for Bamboo Bass Festival in Jaco, Costa Rica in February annually, which is great. I bring down our Karmik volunteers and coordinators who are able to make the commitment; we always have an exciting and eclectic group of all kinds of volunteers. Some of our volunteers for BBF are coming back for their second year with Karmik and are performers, DJs, musicians, etc. at BBF who feel a need to give back to their communities as well. It is going to be exciting this year because it is our first year connecting with local organizations for Central America and South America to support BBF harm reduction! Although we had the same plans last year (2016), it didn’t work out.

This year in 2017, there is: ACEID which is a NGO (non governmental organization) in San José, CR run by my friend, Ernesto Cortes. Also we have Brun Gonzalez, from ESPOLEA in Mexico. They will be bringing their expertise as well as peer support volunteers to BBF. We will all be working together for the harm reduction for the Bamboo Bass Festival in Costa Rica, which is one of the first actions from our working group Harm Reduction in the Americas. We all met last year at the Reform 2016 conference, and spent our time making plans together.

Karmik is always extending internationally to move the harm reduction philosophy forward to help with parties in different regions. In Costa Rica, there is no data and no collection on research on harm reduction philosophy that is accepted into legislative bodies that create changes in policy. Karmik is extremely excited to work with these organizations from Central and South America at BBF because we will be supporting Costa Rica to create their own network of accessible, acceptable harm reduction support.

To be able to start moving those forward with any pragmatism, we need to collect the data, which is always what Karmik is doing. At every event/festival, we are collecting generalized data that is later used in the area of Festival Health & Safety, an emerging health and safety field that Karmik collaborates with. Also, we are always looking for funding; we are currently funded only through private donations (on our website) as well as contracts fulfilled year round. However, we are always looking for external funding; these can be one offs or subject to project completion as well.

We will see what comes next! We will have some more media coming out in 2017, even some documentaries – keep an eye on us to be in the know!

Thank you for your time, Munroe.

Yeah, totally!

An Interview with Gareth Crawford

July 30, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

In brief, how did you become involved with Karmik?

It is an interesting story. So, I was added on Facebook because I am an event promoter. I was promoting events for a couple of years. My friend moved into town. She asked if they could come to events, provide free condoms and drug supplies.

I thought, "This is a good idea." In the community, there are many people using substances. No one else was doing it.

Karmik is based in the west coast.

My friend moved here. She moved from Montreal. She joined forces with others early in the operation. Three people started Karmik.

It is based on aspects of the harm reduction philosophy. It is a strategy and practice through Karmik. What are some examples of this, e.g. in youth party activities.

So, we do not condone or condemn. Evidence-based drug policy is advocated by us. If harm reduction philosophy is not going to be implemented, we will as renegades. We want people to be safe. We meet people where they are at. Mostly, they are at parties.

Many people do not know what they're getting into sometimes. From being in the music community, I have seen drugs have positive effects, and negative effects as well. Overall, knowledge is power.

It is important to teach people. We get to talk to the younger generation and educate them. It is about knowledge and safety.

How can younger generations become involved in Karmik? How can older generations contribute too?

As the communications director, I have the experience of connecting the Karmik message to younger people. For young people, early on, Inner City Beats was one of the first collaborators.

What would you consider the main message to get out about drugs to the public, especially the youth, to correct a larger misconception?

People should know what they're getting into. They can talk to someone older. We want to be bigger brothers and sisters to them. They can talk to us about things that they wouldn't discuss with their parents.

We tell them to learn more, give back, help people, and be safe. There are tons of things you can do. Even if you are going to use, there are things to do to prevent harms, e.g. having a friend around, having safe supplies, and so on.

We are not there to encourage it. However, we are aware of the reality. Brushing it under the rug is no longer acceptable, it has to be addressed.

Harm Reduction and Karmik

July 30, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Harm reduction is the foundational philosophy of Karmik. According to the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC), harm reduction is “a range of support services and strategies to enhance the knowledge, skills, resources, and supports for individuals, families and communities to be safer and healthier.” In other words, the greater well-being of BC citizens through implementation of harm reduction philosophy as strategies. A wealth of research supports the activities, aims, and targeted objectives of harm reduction.

As a philosophy designed to diminish the harms to individuals and society, the harm reduction model is the minority philosophy regarding drug policy. The mainstream position in the public discourse has been the zero tolerance or punitive model for decades. Zero tolerance is characterized by punishment of drug users and ‘abusers’ to set an example of them and others in the future. Unfortunately, the punitive strategy tends to worsen the drug problems in societies.

In contradistinction to the zero tolerance model, the harm reduction model improves the drug problems in society through acknowledgement of perennial drug use in society with a prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement model rather than enforcement model alone (zero tolerance approach) to manage drug policy in society responsibly. The Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in a May 8, 2002 article entitled *CAMH and Harm Reduction: A Background Paper on its Meaning and Application for Substance Use Issues* did an analysis of harm reduction.

The article notes that at the time, or the second decade, of "diffusion and widespread application," of harm reduction strategies. They have become integral to the CAMH. There was and is an emerging consensus of harm reduction strategies is strengths in the reduction of harm to individuals and communities from substance use and misuse.

What practice follows from this? The practical aspects of harm reduction are the main demarcation from zero tolerance. There is a large body of literature or empirical evidence to support harm reduction approaches. This is according to the experts. As noted near the conclusion in section 5 of the article: "the improved health and functioning of individuals and the net impact on our community are notable indicators of the early success of harm reduction."

Karmik is a west coast harm reduction organization that aims to implement practical harm reduction services for youth activities such as festivals and nightlife events. Vancouver, British Columbia, is the central location of our organization. Within the harm reduction model, the increased functioning and health of individuals and society create net benefits for individuals, communities, and society.

Karmik incorporates aspects of the harm reduction philosophy with the nonjudgmental ethical perspective with compassion as its basis. Rather than condemn or condone, we support and do not punish. Compassion to meet people where they are at rather than judge them.

Karmik is part of this tradition and strategy within British Columbia devoted to youth party events in general. With the facts of the matter taken into account, the reality of drug use and misuse in society, of youth using drugs, of the use of drugs at party events, and the failure of zero

tolerance approaches, then the implementation of harm reduction strategies at youth events is integral to improving the health of individual youth and communities where they live.

Further resources exist for those with in an interest to become more informed. Indeed, with the recent fentanyl crisis, self-education is important because the risks of some drugs at certain points are real.

Interview with Alex Betsos – Co-Founder, Karmik

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is Karmik?

Alex Betsos: Karmik is a nightlife/festival harm reduction organization based out of Vancouver, although they do work all over BC.

Jacobsen: What has been its developmental trajectory?

Betsos: Karmik started out as a conversation between myself, Margaret Yu, and Munroe. Margy and I met in Canadian Students for Sensible Drug Policy at Simon Fraser University where I did my undergraduate degree. I started out as the volunteer coordinator, in part because I was Margy's resident drug nerd, with an extensive interest in harm reduction. We actually did a small harm reduction workshop with CSSDP back in 2013, and even worked a show at Red Room in Vancouver, but it never went further than that [I have a picture of this if you want]. Karmik since its inception in 2014 has gone from 3 coordinators and a couple volunteers just trying to figure out how to do harm reduction in Vancouver, to an internationally engaged harm reduction project. I'm proud of my little harm reduction baby, and it still breaks my heart that I cannot be involved at this time. I still do some advising for my former colleagues from time to time, but that's mostly between friends having a beer at this point, nothing formal.

Jacobsen: Now, you are in graduate school. However, what has been your role in it? What is your current role in it?

Betsos: I am not involved with Karmik at this point. I stepped back, as my access to things like the Karmik email were a clear conflict of interest for me in relation to my future research.

In the past I was the volunteer coordinator. My job was to structure the training's, organize them, and also be the bridge between the volunteers and the staff. One of the things about working at a tiny organization is that you normally pick up a couple of other roles too. I also did a lot of the more science-based research stuff, and at some point, picked up communicating with some of the music festivals and drafting the budget. On top of that all of the Karmik coordinators are also event coordinators. That means we go to events, and work with the volunteers to disseminate harm reduction information while making sure people are doing alright.

Jacobsen: How is your graduate school work (congratulations, by the way,) helping with the work in harm reduction, night life, and so on? How is it helping you deep interest in philosophy too, of which I am aware?

Betsos: I'm not sure how much I can say about my research at this point as it is in the preliminary stage. In the past, I have tended to focus on how drug knowledge becomes disseminated and contested. For now, I'll just say that what I'm doing is relatively similar.

My graduate school work does not have a direct impact on harm reduction, or at least not yet (also thanks!). My research area is medical anthropology and science and technology studies. I'm much more interested (at least for now) in how ideas about drugs come to exist. What are the cultural paradigms, the identities of people involved with drugs, whether that's researchers, activists, or people who use drugs? I kind of come from a mindset where I want my research to be applicable, inasmuch as it shows the nuances drug prohibition. One of the areas where there is a real lack of research on drug prohibition broadly, is with non-marginalized people (that

includes people who use drugs, but also people who create services for people who use drugs). My bachelor's research, for example, explored drug knowledge on online forums, particularly focusing on research chemicals. In a world where drugs are illegal, how do people who use drugs acquire knowledge, and make decisions?

This kind of works in with my philosophy questions around what science is and how it is engaged with by a public. Even the question of what counts as knowledge comes into tension when you're talking about the experience of drugs and what clinicians might say about drugs.

Jacobsen: How are organizations including CSSDP and Karmik improving the advancement of harm reduction in Canada and British Columbia?

Betsos: So, there are kind of two aspects to CSSDP, there are the local chapters, and then there is the national board. On the local chapter level, I've seen drug policy students push for naloxone training, access to drug checking, and safer drug information. On the national level one of the things we've done is put out a guide on cannabis education for youth that is based on a harm reduction model. By focusing on harm reduction in cannabis I kind of hope we can shift the perspective on harm reduction more broadly.

Karmik is the advancement of harm reduction in British Columbia! I'm exaggerating, but it is definitely part of the process of making harm reduction more broadly accepted. Munroe has put so much effort into making sure that people have access to naloxone, as well as being involved in working groups. Before Pemberton Music Festival went bankrupt, we had a sanctuary presence there for two years, and last year we did a pilot run on a new style of Sanctuary space at Center of Gravity. One of the biggest things I always thought was important with Karmik though was just providing people in the nightlife community with solid harm reduction information. There were no harm reduction booths at events in Vancouver really before Karmik (although there were some organizations in the past). When I was volunteer coordinator we also taught a lot of people about harm reduction practices. If that in itself is not an advancement, I'm not sure what is.

Jacobsen: What has been the feedback from the younger population and from the professional communities (academic and research)?

Betsos: I have never met someone that did not like what Karmik was doing. I'm not aware of much focus on Karmik in research. It's worth noting that Karmik is kind of the small kid on the block. Organizations like Dancesafe, ANKORS, Trip! Project, have been around for a really long time, and so in a lot of ways they are better for studying.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Alex.

Islamic Supreme Council of Canada

Interview-1: On the non-religious and religious youth, and dialogue, with Prof. Imam Syed Soharwardy

May 26, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Prof. Imam Soharwardy is a Sunni scholar and a shaykh of the Suhrawardi Sufi order, as well as the chairman of the Al-Madinah Calgary Islamic Assembly, founder of Muslims Against Terrorism (MAT), and the founder and president of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada. He founded MAT in Calgary in January 1998. He is also the founder of Islamic Supreme Council of Canada (ISCC).

Imam Soharwardy is the founder of the first ever Dar-ul-Aloom in Calgary, Alberta where he teaches Islamic studies. Prof. Soharwardy is the Head Imam at the Al Madinah Calgary Islamic Centre. Imam Soharwardy is a strong advocate of Islamic Tasawuf (Sufism), and believes that the world will be a better place for everyone if we follow what the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (Peace be upon him) has said, "You will not have faith unless you like for others what you like for yourself." He believes that spiritual weakness in humans causes all kinds of problems.

Mr. Soharwardy can be contacted atsoharwardy@shaw.ca OR Phone (403)-831-6330.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Although, humanists, as young people, want to find community and dialogue. That can come in the form of dialogue in community with young people who are from religious communities.

With respect to the Canadian Muslim community, what are some ways the young humanists and the young Muslims can have a respectful debate or dialogue, or a sit-down coffee to know someone of an opposite worldview to see where they are coming from and see that there are people behind these beliefs?

They are not simply beliefs.

Imam Syed Soharwardy: If you attend my congregation, especially the youth groups, you will see the lively discussion that I have with our students. There are teenage boys and girls up to 20 years old, or 18 or 19.

I have a son. I have a daughter. I have always asked my own son and daughter not to be a Muslim because your parents are Muslim. You want to be a Muslim because you believe in Islam and through your own conscience.

That is what it is. Being a Muslim and following the holy book, the Quran, in almost every volume of the holy Quran, it says, "Why don't you ponder? Why don't you think? Why don't you explore?" It says, "Why don't you explore the world?"

It says to question everything in the Quran, then you will get the answer. We must not be a blind follower of the religion, or humanism, or any belief, whether naturalist or spiritual belief.

We need to understand why we believe. Is our belief system natural, normal, common sense or not? That is why I love to talk anyone of any age, young or old, girls or boys, and answer their questions.

Islam, in my opinion, and, of course, people disagree with religion; I follow a natural, normal, common sense of way of life. Yes, there is a belief system. There is a concept of God. There is a concept of life after death.

However, the steps to those make sense in intellectual discussion, not simply blind following or blind beliefs because I was born into a Muslim family. It is because it is a natural, normal, and common sense religion.

Our boys and girls have lots of questions. I never say, "You cannot question."

I never discourage any youth who have questions in our congregation. You can question everything, every personality. You can question every symbol in Islam, but there is an explanation.

What happens, Scott, you talk to someone who does not understand his or her own religion. When the person him or herself is confused, somebody goes and asks the question, but the person cannot explain properly.

People think, "This is a stupid or a bad religion," because they do not know what they are believing in. But, by the Grace of God, I am not bragging about myself. I hope that when somebody will talk to me that I should be able to answer their questions in a normal, common sense way.

Jacobsen: I like talking to you. I find the conversations enjoyable.

Soharwardy: Thank you.

Jacobsen: With raising children within the Islamic context where questioning is allowed and encouraged, what can a young person do who happens to, unfortunately, not be encouraged in a home setting?

Where the faith is forced on them and no reasons are given except that the parents happen to believe it? I notice this in Canada. The two bigger faiths are Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.

I would assume in Sunni or Shia Islam. In many households, it would be akin to that, where the questioning is not encouraged and the young person may not have developed the capacity.

They may not have had capacity be encouraged to be developed to question those things. If they have a faith, they have a robust faith. If they do not have the faith, they feel okay and comfortable with their family in not believing.

Soharwardy: I completely agree with you. There will be families in the Muslim community who do not allow their children to question the faith. Some of the people and families are rigid. They have been told some things and simply follow it.

In my opinion, that belief is against Islam. It is against what the Quran teaches believers. That you should be pondering, exploring, and seeking. To be a blind follower, that person loses the spirit of Islam.

Some families, they do not allow thinking. It causes a serious harm to the boys and girl who have been forced to follow a belief system. Their heart is not in it.

In Islam, it is a requirement of Islam, a requirement of faith, to practice Islam based on your heart. In Islam, no good deed is accepted by God. Unless, your heart is in it. Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him), he has said it. In one of his sayings, the acceptance of your actions depends on the intentions behind the actions.

If my intention is not to pray 5 times a day, but I have been forced to pray five times per day, that person should know, according to Islam, their prayers are not accepted.

Jacobsen: Wow.

Soharwardy: Nobody should be forced to pray five times per day or fast during the month of Ramadan. It is absolutely non-Islamic that somebody is forced to follow Islam. Islam does not recognize a person's faith if that person has been forced.

I always say that it bothers me, sometimes, when the newspapers talk about these terrorist groups. They are forcing people to convert to Islam. If people are forcing people to follow Islam, and if there is no compulsion in religion, then Islam does not recognize that person as a Muslim.

If I am forcing my children to pray five times per day because it is a requirement of faith, and if they do not want to because they do not have their heart in it, they may pray today and tomorrow.

When they grow up, they may develop a rebellion against the traditions, rituals, and prayers, which were forced on them while they were young. Why do we want to do these things while when they become adults, they will be against it.

I think it is very important for parents to teach their children explain, answer questions, let their children think and question. I remember, Scott, I had a debate with Irshad Manji. I think you know of her.

Jacobsen: Oh yes!

Soharwardy: She wrote a book, *The Problem with Islam Today*. I had a debate with her in her home in Toronto. She wrote that when she was a small child in B.C. Her mother sent her to a mosque to learn Islam.

When she had questions, the teacher said, "Shut up! Do not ask. This is in the Quran, follow it." This is Irshad Manji as a small child. It was normal for her as a child to ask those questions. The teacher messed her up.

The teacher could not answer the questions. What happened? She developed the attitude of rebellion against the faith. If people, if the Muslim parents, continue to do these things, then they will lose their children.

Their children will lose Islam. We should let them get the answers. If they do not want to do it today, then let them be as they are, God willing, once they understand, they will come back.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Imam Soharwardy.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen is the Founder of In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal and In-Sight Publishing. Jacobsen supports science and human rights.

Interview-2: On Open Societies and Closed Societies with Prof. Imam Syed Soharwardy

May 26, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Prof. Imam Soharwardy is a Sunni scholar and a shaykh of the Suhrawardi Sufi order, as well as the chairman of the Al-Madinah Calgary Islamic Assembly, founder of Muslims Against Terrorism (MAT), and the founder and president of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada. He founded MAT in Calgary in January 1998. He is also the founder of Islamic Supreme Council of Canada (ISCC).

Imam Soharwardy is the founder of the first ever Dar-ul-Aloom in Calgary, Alberta where he teaches Islamic studies. Prof. Soharwardy is the Head Imam at the Al Madinah Calgary Islamic Centre. Imam Soharwardy is a strong advocate of Islamic Tasawuf (Sufism), and believes that the world will be a better place for everyone if we follow what the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (Peace be upon him) has said, "You will not have faith unless you like for others what you like for yourself." He believes that spiritual weakness in humans causes all kinds of problems.

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Scott Douglas Jacobsen: With respect to open societies and closed societies, Canada is an open society and a constitutional monarchy, but also a pluralistic, multiethnic, and multifaith, society.

It comes with a lot of complexity. In any open society, any movement on any of the dials of the society in terms of progress or non-progress—in other words, openness or closedness—of the society—starts with dialogue.

What are some 'hot button' things that people are potentially afraid to talk about and is allowing the vacuum of conversation to be filled by the more extreme voices? That may be leading to a more closed society rather than a more open, tolerant one.

Imam Syed Soharwardy: In my opinion, in an open society like Canada, people should be allowed to express their opinions. Sometimes, it could be an offensive opinion. Sometimes, it could be a very strong disagreement, but people should be allowed to express or ask what they want to know without persecution or fear of backlash.

An open society, it is also in danger of a certain element of the society taking advantage of the freedom of the society, which it enjoys, and then try to undermine a segment of society, a group of people, by intimidating them, bullying them, and so on.

An open society does not mean people have the open freedom to spread hate against a segment of society. An open society means, what I understand, having an open dialogue, critical discussions, criticizing each other on different topics.

That is absolutely fine. The civil discussion is absolutely fine. What is, in my opinion, in an open society should not be done is causing harm to a segment of society, which may be a small minority of the society; however, they have the equal rights to live in the society with respect.

That is the norm that has to be in place. Otherwise, civil society will not be a civil society. It will be the law of a jungle. Openness does not mean that I cannot question a religion. The openness that, yes, I should be able to question and be able to ask questions. However, I have to have an attitude to get know or understand others, but not to incite or stereotype the whole community of that particular group.

That is what it is. That is the beauty of Canada. In Canada, there is a balance of freedom of expression as well as a responsible society. Sometimes, it leads to abuse. Then there are laws in place to prevent the abuse of this freedom.

I think intolerance increases if we do not allow people to ask questions because when people are oppressed or controlled. They develop the anger in their hearts, in their insides.

There would be a time when the anger comes out and becomes violence. In order to prevent violence, let the people express, so they can have a civil dialogue, I want to add one thing here. If you remember, the cartoonists published the pictures of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

I was the one who took him to the human rights commission. He always says that I took him to the human rights commission because he drew the cartoons of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which he thought he had the freedom to publish the cartoons.

That is absolutely not my understanding. Yes, he has his view to have his view on what he does not understand. My problem is not that he does not accept my prophet, but it does hurt me when someone portrays and makes fun of my prophet. It hurts.

I understand that the speech that could hurt someone is legal and allowed. I understand that. We should have the tolerance to hear hurt people. When I saw those cartoons, it was not about the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It was about the Muslim community to be stereotyped.

Because people have to understand. The Islamic faith is not like today's Christian society, today's Jewish society. The majority of Muslims, even in the 21st century, have a belief in Islam, which is nothing but the sayings and actions of one man.

It is Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Prophet Muhammad is not just one person in the Islamic faith, one prophet in the Islamic faith, or a leader of the Islamic faith. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is Islam.

When someone represents him as a terrorist, which was what the cartoons were about, it means that you are representing the whole religion of Islam as terrorists. That is not acceptable. That is, in my opinion, hate mongering.

That is why I stood up against it; anyone can criticize Islam. We live in a free society. It is absolutely fine. But no right to stereotype a society with hateful, symbolic, barbaric language.

Jacobsen: You were also part of the atheist bus campaign in Canada, in small part. What was your role in that? What was your stance on that?

Soharwardy: That was my campaign by the way. When I heard the Freethought Society of Canada is running a campaign, I thought that if they have the freedom to express their view about God.

Then I have the same freedom to express my views about God. When I campaign, I spend my own money. Several of my close friends campaigned in Calgary saying, “God does exist and He loves you.”

Jacobsen: [Laughing] This is great. I love that.

Soharwardy: This was our campaign. It was civil. There was no hate. There was no violence. From either side, it ended in a peaceful way, like a Canadian way.

Jacobsen: [Laughing] That is true. I like that. Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Imam Soharwardy.

(Updated September 28, 2016)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen founded *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal* and *In-Sight Publishing*. He authored/co-authored some e-books, free or low-cost. If you want to contact Scott: Scott.D.Jacobsen@Gmail.com, Scott.Jacobsen@TrustedClothes.Com, Scott@ConatusNews.Com, scott.jacobsen@probc.ca, Scott@Karmik.Ca, or SJacobsen@AlmasJiwaniFoundation.Org.

AUSU Executive Blog

June Executive Blog

June, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

My first post for the AUSU Executive Blog, for June 2017 – what topic? Community & gratitude. Okay, that’s two topics, but a worthwhile combined topic to me. When I reflect on the nature of AU, and listening to the continual concerns of the AU community, one of the large ones is community.

AU comes from the newer tradition of distance and online education and holds the title of a “Global Pioneer” in open, online, and distance education. I feel honored to serve students, as their needs arise. In reflection on a proper topic to write for the Executive Blog, I looked at previous posts.

I wanted to gauge the reported concerns and hopes for the community from the view of AUSU executives, past and present. Some of the topics included, in one word, waiting, advocacy, representation, AU, cheating, surveys, requirements, vacation, and affordability– more or less.¹

Shawna Wasylyshyn, Kim Newsome, Julian Teterenko, and Brandon Simmons, wrote those months’ Executive Blog posts. Happily, I have worked with each of them on council, and executive. To make a community, perhaps, a face and personality to the names may help the membership.

Since I was elected as VP Finance and Administration (VPFA), and before it, Shawna has been invaluable. I found her active, an engaged listener, knowledgeable of the organization and the needs of students, and unafraid to speak her mind and express concerns in a thorough way on behalf of students.

I also express gratitude to Kim Newsome (prior VPFA) for advice, calls, run-through’s, and general training for the VPFA position. She has been patient, and a valuable mentor.

Julian is the Vice President External Affairs (VPEX). We came into AUSU at the same time. He has a real strength in being direct, being quick on the response, and taking a firm stance on issues. He is a real asset to AUSU, and to the membership, as well. He is a part of the Ukrainian Scouts and the Canadian Forces Primary Reserves.

In fact, Julian and I worked intensively together in late May. We went on a business trip from May 22nd to the 27th for the Canadian Alliance of Students’ Associations (CASA) Foundations 2017 conference to learn about CASA, of which AUSU is a part. We worked together in a national venue, in Ottawa, with 20 or more university student unions represented by executives too. It was an extraordinary experience – humbling too – and an honor to represent everyone there. I am sure Julian would agree with the sentiment.

We got to know each other more. I saw sides of Julian, which I never saw before – and this made the experience of working and knowing one another even better. I am grateful for the experience and being able to work with Julian.

Brandon Simmons was the previous VP External and Student Affairs. I have known him as a highly devoted family man, who makes sacrifices on behalf of familial ties. It is honorable. Now, he, and Andrew Gray, Amanda Lipinski, Robin Bleich, and Kim Newsome, are the non-executive part of council.

All of this gratitude, and sentiment, amount to reflections on community. Even though executive remains small relative to the council, and to the student body or to the AUSU membership, we build a small community within and with council.

It took time, effort, and an openness to see parts of one another – at least for me – we never saw before. However small executive is, or even council, relative to the size of the AUSU membership, it is a reflection of the AU community.

I also think about the staff making things run behind the proverbial curtain, including Donette Kingyens, Karl Low, Jamie Mulder, and the newly hired Jodi Campbell. I am eternally grateful for their help bringing the community together, because we're in this...together.

Everyone asks, "How can we make more of a community feeling at AU – with everyone so disparate, so apart, and feeling so alone in their educational progress?" I do not like clichés. They feel banal. At the same time, they reflect, at times, *some* deeper truths. One such truth is that community takes time, effort, an openness to different avenues of building community, and – the big one – it is a two-way street. It rings true to me. Perhaps it will for you, too.

I am grateful for the community within council, and of AUSU students. I trust, with time and effort, we can make that community stronger, together.

Scott Jacobsen
VP Finance and Administration

¹ The rest included being on council, the Fort McMurray fire, sustainability of the university, the Bylaws of AUSU, prizes, CASA and AUSU, the "service standards," the federal election, AU's task force on sustainability, the stuff AUSU does for students, running for the By-Election, various AUSU work projects, AUSU and The Voice Magazine, decreasing oil prices and the situation with Interim President MacKinnon, the AUSU planner, app, and health and dental, changeover of the AUSU team, the "Call Centre" and the "Tutor" models, and the introduction of the AUSU Executive Blog.

September Executive Blog

September, 2017

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September is here, and so with it the Fall. At AU, there is 12 months of intake, so this is not necessarily a new time for all of you. But these are the ending times of the year, and time for celebration if you're finishing your course(s) or starting one.

There has been a lot going on in the month of August, and most likely for September. For my own schedule, I have been busy with meetings for AU and for AUSU. But I even managed to sign up for some courses too, so if you're in courses this round, then I am with you (and feel your excitement!).

At AUSU, there's been a lot ongoing. The big thing happening for AUSU has been our proposed bylaw revisions and the consultations involved in those. If you look at the revisions, the main changes include an increase from 9 to 13 councillors, revisions to the sections on the membership fees and The Voice Magazine, an addition outlining the responsibilities of the executive director, signing authority regulations, and the addition of a strategic plan of AUSU. These are all vital component for the creation of a thriving students' union at Athabasca University. You can read more about the bylaw changes online [here](#).

It is important to note that we have had one public consultation for the Bylaws Revision Consultation on September 6. We will be having another on September 19 at 6:00 pm MT. The teleconference instructions are available online [here](#). I hope to see you there! You can also comment on the bylaw forum [here](#).

It is important to take part in the activities with the AU students' union, because I feel as though the distance nature of the institution can leave us all feeling a bit disparate at times, even alone. However, it doesn't have to be that way. It's not some law of nature. As I think about the upcoming month and the courses, I am reminded of the resources that AUSU offers and our great community. It's all there, and simply a matter of coming to the plate with a bat.

We have [The Voice Magazine](#) for topics of interest for AU students. If you're ever having a difficult time in terms of stress and wellness, we have the [Student LifeLine](#). If you want to talk to other students and gain access to other services, you can download the [AU student mobile app](#). It is a great resource to connect and comment with other students. Be mobile!

Other services offered by AUSU can help you make the most of your AU experience, such as our [awards and bursaries](#), [eyewear discounts](#), online learning opportunities though [lynda.com](#), and resources for [career development](#). We're here to help you because we represent you. Part of that is finding out what matters most to *you* as an AUSU member and AU student.

September is the time of fall, but it is also a period of starting anew in courses. It is a time to refresh and to reload – plus, we'll all have lots more inside time to study as the weather gets less sunny.

And, of course, I'll be right there studying alongside, and working for, you.

Scott Jacobsen
VP Finance and Administration

Develop Africa

Interview with Ajomuzu Collette Bekaku – Founder and Executive Director of CAPEC

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Cameroon Association for the Protection and Education of the Child (CAPEC) is one of Develop Africa's Partner in Cameroon. Below is an interview with Ajomuzu Collette Bekaku – Founder and Executive Director of CAPEC

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was the original interest in the protection and education of children?

I grew up in a community where child labour was perceived as “normal”. It was a time in Africa, especially in Cameroon, when it was normal for children to help parents at home with little household chores like sweeping the compound, selling fruits to raise income for the family, etc., just to name a few. However, it was also a time when it was normal for children to work on banana and rubber plantations. It was also normal for them to carry very heavy loads on their heads (which impairs their health and growth), and it was normal for them to work under hazardous conditions full of dangerous chemicals and insecticides (which also impairs their education, health and growth). As a result of seeing this situation in my community i.e. child labour, I became motivated and pushed myself to become an advocate for children’s protection and education.

I personally believe that children should be educated, offered opportunities for their development and not used as labourers.

What was the inspiration for the foundation of the Cameroon Association for the Protection and Education of the Child (CAPEC)?

I grew up with a single parent (my mum), in Mambanda Village, who was a primary school teacher. The majority of people leaving in this village were peasant farmers who were working in Banana and Rubber plantations for the Cameroon Development Cooperation (CDC), who were paid according to their daily productivity. In order for them to increase productivity and make more money at the end of the month, parents were obliged to use their children as labourers in the plantations. Children worked under hazardous conditions. As a 10-year-old girl, I went through this hardship and pain like other children in my situation. During this phase of my life, I organised storytelling events among fellow children aiming to focus our respective visions on life. This enabled me to understand that children, even while poor and living in hard conditions, all had so much potential and vision. This motivated me to promote the rights of children in poor, rural communities like where I grew up. This story and history lives in me, and my actions are still guided by my passion for a community where child rights are promoted and respected. Immediately I graduated from university, and in conjunction with my work within various communities, I thought of formalising and sustaining the response to challenges faced by children by creating CAPEC, which is a growing, reputable and non-profit organisation. I started CAPEC in order to protect and educate underprivileged children living in various communities across Cameroon.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was the original interest in the protection and education of children?

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What tasks and responsibilities come with being the executive director of the CAPEC?

As the executive director and vision bearer, I am in charge of the overall supervision of the organisation. I manage the relationships between the technical team and the Board within the organisation, as well as the relationship between the organisations and its partners. I also oversee the heads of each department of CAPEC, including fundraising, program development, HR management and accounting. I also oversee the public relation the organisation maintains outside office and normal business hours. Furthermore, I attend and also host a range of fundraising events, new program inaugurations and public-relations events. I often speak directly with reporters, donors, government representatives and members of the community at these events (spending a good deal of time acting as the public face of the organisation).

What is the current size of the staff and those cared for by CAPEC?

We have twenty-four staff in Kumba and Yaoundé office, five outreach officers, fifteen in the CAPEC Education Project (Teachers/Administrative staff), and four work in the office on CAPEC-related projects

For those that don't know, and many simply won't because grassroots work is learned through action, what difficulties arise in the midst of grassroots organisation?

CAPEC carry out a lot of projects in rural communities ranging from HIV/AIDS, wealth creations, education, gender/capacity building. Apart from the individual challenges we faced during executing these various projects, there are other general challenges and difficulties we face as a grassroots organisation, such as:

Difficult terrain: Most project areas are very difficult to assess during mid raining season, and thus needing a four-wheel drive vehicle to be able to reach these areas – which we cannot afford.

Social challenges: Weak community leadership and a difficult mindset rooted in the people living here, especially concerning the HIV/AIDS Program. A lot of people living in rural areas believe HIV/AIDS don't exist, and consider it witchcraft. It's difficult to convince them to get tested and actually get a sustained buy-in from community leaders.

Money: CAPEC need money for operations. We face difficulty in raising adequate funding to support our programmes and operations. There is no direct correlation between increased work and increased income; unlike a for-profit company where the work you do is directly sold for revenue. So NGOs have to put a lot of its resources into creating successful media campaigns, getting the right connections, filling in tons of forms and paperwork for grants, aid and taxation. Not to forget, of course, the hassle of getting an NGO recognised as an NGO, and finding a secure way of getting tax-exempt donations. What all this results in is a lack of focus. The people created the NGO to solve a problem and now the focus is on doing things that get attention to help raise money. This leads to disconnect between vision and work. The funding environment for Cameroon is getting more and more challenging with more donors reducing funding interest for the country. NGOs struggle to mobilise resources in response to community needs and CAPEC is also faced with this challenge.

What are some of the eventual emotional difficulties and rewards?

NGOs like CAPEC are typically mission-driven advocacy or service organisations in the non-profit sector. Currently, NGOs are critical contributors in global efforts to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. However, the growth in the number of local and international NGOs in this sector has made it very difficult to secure funding to maintain staff and meeting our organisation objectives. Competition has become extensively stiff, especially with the presence of international organisations everywhere. This has made local NGOs engage in more and more fundraising activities to sustain their activities. The members of staff often work long hours and yet the works itself has proven exhilarating and exceptionally rewarding as it is critically important to causes served.

CAPEC is not governmental and is a non-profit organisation. You founded the organisation in 2002. You work with young people, parents, and various governmental and intergovernmental bodies, and your main aims are the promotion of community welfare. What values and principles inform community welfare for CAPEC?

CAPEC operates with a primary focus on and responsibility for the providing of a higher, broader, and more public level of help for vulnerable children, adolescents, girls and women. This principle is further attached to the integral values of the organisation that includes but is not limited to: i) respect for human rights; ii) the maintenance of our vision; iii) cooperation beyond borders; iv) public mindedness; v) accountability; vi) truthfulness; vii) transparency; and viii) non-profit integrity.

CAPEC's vision is to allow children to realise their full-potential. What other sub-visions stem from this?

Other sub-visions include increasing the impact of activities centred on the promotion of child rights. This is achieved through a high-level advocacy in conjunction with a coalition of associations and NGOs with a similar vision. In this regard, I have contacted a host of leaders of associations and NGOs who have accepted and are motivated to be co-founders of such a coalition. It is hoped that this initiative will have an influence on programming from individual association and NGO perspective so that child-right programming will become a reality.

What are the main activities, campaigns, and initiatives of CAPEC?

Core Activities:

The gender and Capacity Building Department:

Gender awareness/Human Rights training.

Training in group dynamics and leadership.

Skill training for women/youth groups (e.g., soap making, tie & dye, production of bakery products, mushrooms, nutrition, etc.)

Training in starting and managing small business for affiliated groups.

In-house training for both national and international volunteers

Health/HIV/OVCs:

Ongoing basic health training focusing on hygiene, sanitation and nutrition.

Provision of care and support to OVCs and PLWHAs

HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention sensitisation working alongside community-based groups, young people and schools.

Education Project:

Elementary, Primary and Secondary Education:

Under our Education Projects there are several subprograms that seek to develop children and surrounding communities as part of CAPEC's primary mission. Currently, CAPEC has the following schools: Bitame Lucia Nursery and Primary School (BLIS) and Bitame Lucia Secondary School (BLIC)

Your targeted objectives utilise the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child without regard to tribe, sex, religion, or origin to protect children of sexual exploitation, forced child marriage, and child labour. Your work focuses on centres for the disabled and street children, orphanages, and prisons and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. How do these look on-the-ground?

It's not an easy task, considering that they look upon themselves as not acceptable in their society. It makes it difficult to approach them. Lots of talking and sensitisation needs to be done

in order to get them participating in those important activities that concern their well-being. It is very difficult working with people with different religions and traditions. They have their entrenched way of thinking and their own entrenched lifestyle. However, we have been able to get some of them listen to us. Our long commitment to hard work and the determination of our dedicated team is proving to be fruitful.

Some of the activities we do to get street children and orphans to listen to us include: arts and crafts; painting; dancing and music – which are activities that can distract their minds from their present predicaments. With such simple and interactive activities, we have been able to get them interested in our activities.

What are your future hopes for growth, expansion of initiatives, and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Children in different parts of Cameroon suffer from different forms of abuse, violence and torture. For example, in Akwaya sub-division there's a lot of children being forced into child marriage at a tender age of 10. This is because of the impoverished state that their parents are usually in. My intention is to expand our programs nationwide and to target other forms of abuse suffers by children; not just child labour.

In 2009, CAPEC started a school for orphans and children from low income families to provide them with quality and affordable education. According to CAPEC, education is not only the main solution to poverty but it also stands at the heart of sustainable human development. However, the present formal education system in Cameroon is not functioning properly and is a serious contributory factor to dropout and failure. The current curriculum in government schools lacks relevance. The child-teacher ratio is too high (80-100 children per class), and slow children are never taken care of: "once you fail, you have failed." CAPEC school offer youngsters in Cameroon from 4 until 12 years and adolescents from 13 till 18 years old a high-quality education.

CAPEC intend to expand this child-centred education to other regions in Cameroon. With high-quality education and the holistic development of children, we believe that their dreams can be realised.

For those that want to work together or become involved, what are recommended means of contacting CAPEC?

For those who would like to volunteer in CAPEC's Projects or work in partnership on specific programs can contact us via

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Email: info@capecam.org / cbekaku@yahoo.com

Website: www.capecam.org

<https://www.facebook.com/CAPEC20/?fref=ts>

<https://www.facebook.com/Nkolfoulou/>

Thank you for your time, Ajomuzu.

Atheist Alliance of America

Atheist Refugees Doubly Vulnerable

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Atheist asylum seekers fleeing persecution for their lack of belief in the dominant religion of their culture are at high risk of danger

As reported by DW, “Mahmudul Haque Munshi’s name was on a hit list in Bangladesh. After five of his friends and associates were murdered, the authorities warned the blogger: ‘There’s nothing more we can do for you.’ Munshi had to leave the country in 2015.”

Often, atheist refugees or asylum seekers will have to travel through several nations simply to find a safehaven. Some have seen what is labelled, purportedly, a “Global Hit List” of nonbelievers or those who left their faith who must be killed.

Many atheist refugees fear being killed by other refugees or those who feel personal resentment for individuals who leave religion.

Especially at risk are those who publicly speak out against religion, becoming the targets of reactionary violence.

One refugee organization devoted to the plight of the non-religious is the Atheist Refugee Relief organization. It has helped 37 nonreligious refugees since November 2017 and continues to do important work for them.

Dittmar Steiner of Atheist Refugee Relief stated, “We are actually dealing with assaults, exclusion, threats and violence.”

31-one-year-old Worood Zuhair, a biologist from Karbala, Iraq, stated that she is under police protection and continues to receive death threats because of the lack of personal religious belief.

“When your own father gives your soul to Azrael, the angel of death, that is enormously painful,” Zuhair told DW. “He did it so often. I couldn’t take it anymore.”

Zuhair speaks about the abuse of women refugees, not simply as refugees but in virtue of their criticism of religion and their work for the rights of women within standard human rights frameworks.

Mahmudul Haque Munshi, founder of the Shahbag movement in his home country in 2013, became a target of Islamists as his movement called for war criminals to be held accountable for their crimes during the Bangladeshi war for independence.

With a prominent blog and network, Munshi garnered about half of a million followers. There were mass protests in the streets with subsequent death threats directed at him.

Atheists are not the majority of refugees and are not the majority of the world’s population, but atheists are a struggling minority within the global and refugee population. They suffer from fear and ignorance-based stigma held against them by the religious.

According to the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), ‘Origin from a particular country or a particular reason for fleeing, such as religious affiliation or atheism, does not automatically lead to a protection status.’

Atheism on the Rise in Turkey

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Despite Erdogan's measures to push Islam, a growing number of people in Turkey are non-religious.

There has been a continuous growth in the number of non-religious people in the Turkey, a dramatic development in the theocratic state known for working to keep evolution out of the classrooms.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues to push theocratic politics, but the rise in atheism would call into question the effectiveness of the measures he has been imposing.

As reported, "According to a recent survey by the pollster Konda, a growing number of Turks identify as atheists. Konda reports that the number of nonbelievers tripled in the past 10 years. It also found that the share of Turks who say they adhere to Islam dropped from 55 percent to 51 percent."

The official directorate of religious affairs in Turkey, Diyanet, declared in 2014 that 99% of the Turkish public identifies as Muslim. However, in light of the recent survey data from Konda, this has sparked debated within the country.

Ahmet Balyemez, a 36-year-old computer scientist, states, "There is religious coercion in Turkey... People ask themselves: Is this the true Islam? ... When we look at the politics of our decision-makers, we can see they are trying to emulate the first era of Islam. So, what we are seeing right now is primordial Islam... Fasting and praying were the most normal things for me."

Cemil Kilic, a theologian, considers both statistics correct: 99% of Turks may identify as Muslim, but only do so from a cultural or sociological perspective.

He states, "The majority of Muslims in Turkey are like the Umayyads, who ruled in the seventh century... The prayers contained in the Koran reject injustice. But the Umayyads regarded daily prayer as a form of showing deference towards the sultan, the state and the powers that be... Regular prayers have become a way to signal obedience toward the political leadership... And prayers in mosques increasingly reflect the political worldview of those in power."

President Erdogan has been in power for almost 16 years, as prime minister until 2014 and then as president onwards.

Ateizm Dernegi, the central organization for atheists in Turkey, has, through its leader, Selin Ozhoken, stated that the desire by Erdogan to produce devout Muslims has, in fact, failed in a number of ways.

Dernegi explains, "Religious sects and communities have discredited themselves... We have always said that the state should not be ruled by religious communities, as this leads to people questioning their faith and becoming humanist atheists."

Navy Strikes Down Application for Atheist Chaplain

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

“If the U.S. Navy appointed its first atheist chaplain...what could his duties as a chaplain be? Perhaps he could tell a sailor seeking spiritual solace in the face of death not to worry, he has no soul, anyway,” writes the nameless author.

The navy has rejected the application of Jason Heap, a doctor in theological history, who had applied for the position of atheist chaplain, The Washington Times reports.

The author of the article, conspicuously anonymous, indulges in a ‘witticism’ on the apparently paradoxical nature of the position: “If the U.S. Navy appointed its first atheist chaplain, as the organized atheists demanded (twice), what could his duties as a chaplain be? Perhaps he could tell a sailor seeking spiritual solace in the face of death not to worry, he has no soul, anyway.”

Heap sued in 2014 and again in 2018, losing both times. The Navy nearly permitted the appointment, but then the Chaplain Appointment and Retention Eligibility Advisory Group made a recommendation that went to the chief of naval operations, who decides who can and cannot be a chaplain.

22 senators, 45 congressmen, and 67 members of Congress told the Navy not to make the appointment. So they did not.

The lawmakers explained their case, “Without a belief in the transcendent, and with avowed opposition to religion itself... an individual cannot fulfill the mission and duties of a chaplain.”

“Without a belief in the transcendent, and with avowed opposition to religion itself... an individual cannot fulfill the mission and duties of a chaplain.”

On which our clever author elaborates: “This would seem to be self-evident, but nothing is self-evident any longer in America, with a man now enabled to take another man as his bride, and with a woman enabled to lead men in an assault on an enemy position and men, women and children free to use a latrine together.”

Does the marriage officiant declare “I now pronounce you husband and wife” at a gay wedding, or might our pearl clutching friend be the slightest bit misled on the ‘perils’ of progress?

Republican Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi was the leader of the opposition. He is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The 22 senators, in their letter, noted that the U.S. Navy holds authority to create programs for humanists and atheists, but the Chaplain Corps should not be the place.

“The Navy’s leadership has done the right thing,” Sen. Wicker stated. “The appointment of an atheist to a religious position is fundamentally incompatible with atheism’s secularism.”

Wicker views chaplaincy as a recourse for religious people and not for the non-religious. Rep. Douglas Lamborn (R) from Colorado agreed with Wicker, arguing that the appointment would have gone against what he sees as the original role of the chaplaincy.

“The appointment of an atheist to a historically religious role would have gone against everything the chaplaincy was created to do. It would open the door to a host of so-called

chaplains who represent [a] philosophical worldview and not the distinctly religious role of the Chaplain Corps.”

Breaking Identity Barriers for a More Diverse Atheism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Claire Klingenberg, President of the European Council of Skeptic Organizations, has a background in law and psychology, and is currently working on her degree in Religious Studies. She has been involved in the skeptic movement since 2013 as co-organizer of the Czech Paranormal Challenge. Since then, she has consulted on various projects, where woo & belief meet science. Claire has spoken at multiple science and skepticism conferences and events. She also organized the European Skeptics Congress 2017, and both years of the Czech March for Science.

Her current activities include chairing the European Council of Skeptical Organisations, running the “Don’t Be Fooled” project (which provides free critical thinking seminars to interested high schools), contributing to the Czech Religious Studies journal Dingir, as well as to their online news in religion website. In her free time, Claire visits various religious movements to better understand what draws people to certain beliefs.

Claire lives in Prague, Czech Republic, with her partner and dog.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When it comes to a demographic analysis of, and a discussion of identity in the New Atheist movement, I’ve noticed that the movement seems to be dominated by white men. In your opinion, what is the reason behind the disproportionate amount of white men and men in general in the atheist and New Atheist movements?

Claire Klingenberg: I think it stems from history. Men, white men, were prevalent in the sciences, in high positions, in professorial positions, in everything. This is simply a continuation of that. There is, however, an increasing number of women engaged in these issues.

Change takes time, as does activism. Having the time necessary to engage in activism that advocates for change of the bigger picture, and does not precisely deal with the here and now, is a luxury. Both the atheist and skeptic movements do deal with the here and now, but in a much broader sense, which makes them a luxury item. Unfortunately, as we see the demographics in the US, people of color are not always in a socioeconomic position to be able to afford this kind of luxury.

So, we have to work on making our movement more accessible to various socioeconomic demographics.

Jacobsen: Other than socio-economic status, what other variables seem to play into this split in the community, where there are far more men than women?

Klingenberg: Historically, the skeptic movement was initiated by older white men. I can imagine some people would not feel welcome when they do not see some of their own within that group.

Fortunately, within the Czech Republic, one of the founders was a woman. She opened the door for us. I can understand why some might feel out of place or misunderstood.

Jacobsen: On the flip side, other communities in the States are heavily dominated by minority groups. An example that immediately comes to mind are the Episcopal or Baptist denominations, which are largely represented by African-Americans.

It seems that fluidity between different communities could be challenge, as community is closely tied with identity, which, in many cases, can mean skin tone.

Klingenberg: Skin tone is a reality which does define the circumstances in which you live and which influence you and your identity. Because of that, you may feel, “How can these people understand what I am going through?”, and especially the feeling “How can these people have the same goals as I do?” This logic or thinking could be another barrier to identity diversity within the atheist community.

Jacobsen: There is also an assumption that people should act according to the group they belong to; when they deviate, they are ridiculed. A relatively benign example might be the archetypal white guy breakdancing. A less comical example might be that of the African-American woman who must be religious, must be Baptist, must be heavily involved in that community.

Neil deGrasse Tyson relates how, although he was passionate about astrophysics and astronomy, he was often expected to be more involved in sports activities.

Even good will and good intentions can exacerbate divisions along belief lines.

Klingenberg: Last month, I was at a talk by Anna Grodzka. She is a Polish trans woman. She founded a supporting organization for trans people in Poland. She said, “We live in a world haunted by stereotypes, which often do not reflect reality but are, rather, imposed upon us.”

I think that is a beautiful way to summarize all of this. People have these stereotypes in their heads regarding identity, which many times do not come even close to reflecting reality. However, we are forced to live and fight with them on a daily basis. It is unfortunate, but we must encourage independent thought, regardless of identity, for precisely this reason.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Claire.

The Meaning of Life: Research Suggests Shift Towards Secular Values

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Research by PEW would seem to suggest that fewer Americans are deriving their sense of meaning in life from religion or spirituality.

In late 2017, Pew Research Center conducted two separate surveys. One posed an open-ended question to gauge what Americans feel gives meaning or fulfilment to their lives. Another asked more specific questions about meaning, offering options that ranged from careers, faith and family, to hobbies, pets, and travel. The most important sources of meaning to Americans in the first survey were Family (69%), Career (34%), and Money (23%).

In both of the surveys, family occupied the top position as the most important source of meaning. Interestingly, religion is not the most important source of meaning for many in the United States. In fact, a mere 20% attributed their source of meaning and fulfilment to religion in the open-ended questions.

Americans would seem to derive meaning in life from non-religious sources, implying a further shift in a secular direction.

“One-third bring up their career or job, nearly a quarter mention finances or money, and one-in-five cite their religious faith, friendships, or various hobbies and activities,” Pew Research stated. “Additional topics that are commonly mentioned include being in good health, living in a nice place, creative activities and learning or education. Many other topics also arose in the open-ended question, such as doing good and belonging to a group or community, but these were not as common.”

It would appear that communal, familial, and social activities provide more meaning for Americans than religion. Intriguingly, within the subgroup who identified with religion as a source of meaning for them, over 50% stated that this is the single most important source of meaning in their entire life.

Aside from family as the main source of meaning, and religion as the most important thing to those who identify religion as a source of meaning, the wealthier and more educated sectors of American society claim “friendship, good health, stability and travel” as important sources of fulfilment for them.

Evangelicals and atheists are split in their sources of fulfillment, with the former tending to find meaning in faith and the latter in activities and finances. On a related finding, politically conservative Americans find meaning in religion, while liberal-inclined individuals find meaning in causes and creative activities.

In general, the less educated, more religious, and more conservative find meaning in religion and the more educated, less religious, and more wealthy find meaning in activities, creativity, and travel. It is of comfort to note that people on both ends of the spectrum continue to find meaning in family.

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